

Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation
Vital Voices — Season 3, Episode 1
Interview with Afaf Meleis and Kelley Skeff

Holly J. Humphrey, MD, MACP (HJH):

Welcome back to [Vital Voices](#), a podcast from the [Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation](#). I am Dr. Holly Humphrey, the president of the Foundation. Our third season of Vital Voices focuses on the [2023 cohort of Macy Faculty Scholars](#), six individuals chosen to participate in our two-year [Macy Faculty Scholars](#) career development program because of their demonstrated potential as future leaders in medical and nursing education. I look forward to sharing their fascinating work and experiences with you over the course of this season. However, before we hear directly from the Scholars, I want to start this season by talking with two colleagues who have been part of the Macy Faculty Scholars Program since the very beginning, dating back to its inception in 2010. When my predecessor, Dr. George Thibault, began to develop the Macy Faculty Scholars Program, he sought input from several distinguished medical and nursing educators. [Dr. Afaf Meleis](#) and [Dr. Kelley Skeff](#) were two of those individuals. Their input was instrumental to the launch of the program and their ongoing service as members of the program's National Advisory Committee has been a great asset to our Scholars. Today, I have the joy of speaking with both of them.

Dr. Afaf Meleis is Professor and Dean Emerita at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing and Professor Emerita at the University of California, San Francisco. She is an internationally renowned nurse researcher and medical sociologist who has mentored hundreds of students and faculty in the United States and across the world. Her scholarly work advanced the Transitions Theory, which focuses on assisting nurses in facilitating healthy transitions for patients, families, and communities. To say that my colleagues joining me today are living legends would not be a misnomer because, in fact, Dr. Meleis has been named an official Living Legend by the American Academy of Nursing.

Dr. Kelley Skeff is the George DeForest Barnett Professor of Medicine at Stanford University School of Medicine and internationally known in his own right. As Co-Director of the Stanford Faculty Development Center, Dr. Skeff focuses on methods to assist faculty and residents to improve their teaching effectiveness. He also spent two decades as the Internal Medicine Residency Program Director at Stanford. In fact, it was in that capacity when he and I first met. Most recently, his research interests have focused on physician distress.

As members of the National Advisory Committee, Afaf and Kelley not only helped select the Scholars, but they serve as formal mentors to members of each Scholar cohort. They guide and advise their individual mentee on their scholarly project and help Scholars move their work from conceptualization to scholarship and dissemination. They also serve in a sponsorship function. For many of our Scholars, the powerful relationship with their National Advisory Committee mentor extends well beyond the two-year award period. And now here's my conversation with Drs. Afaf Meleis and Kelley Skeff.

Holly J. Humphrey, MD, MACP (HJH):

Afaf and Kelley, it is wonderful to connect with you today. Thank you for joining me.

Afaf Meleis, PhD, DrPS(hon), FAAN, LL (AM):

We are delighted.

HJH:

Okay, Afaf, let's start with you. Your life story could fill the pages of multiple books, but I would like you to share with our listeners a few comments about what actually brought you to a career in nursing education and then specifically to your involvement with the Macy Foundation Scholars Program.

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AM:

Thank you, Holly. I actually was thinking about this, and I have three defining milestones that were important in my interest and in my passion about education in the health professions. The first one happened at my graduation with a bachelor degree from the University of Alexandria, Egypt, where I was immediately recruited to be an instructor for the freshmen class and then to the senior class. I found out I loved teaching, I loved mentoring, and I was being groomed for an academic career. But it didn't take long, however, to realize I lacked the skills, the knowledge for effective, quality teaching and for quality education. Then comes the second milestone. The second milestone happened at UCLA in my master's program, which actually in the 60s and the 70s, this career interest coincides with what was going on in nursing at the time.

The specializations in the master's program were education and administration. So these were the two choices. So obviously, I chose education, and this is where I realized there is actually science, there is art, there is a knowledge base that prepares for evidence-based educational programs and teaching careers. I also learned to be an effective educator, it should be based on deliberate process, starting with having a philosophical and theoretical basis. I also found out there is actually scholarship related to education that needs to be done. The third milestone then kicked in, Holly, and my focus on education. This was more with omission than commission. Graduate education and nursing pivoted away from education and administration to clinical phenomena.

And so we were graduating then-graduates who knew very little about the educational process, and there was a lot of paucity in science and also in research related to it. So it was obvious that we needed to do something about that. This is when I also at the time chaired the NAM Forum for Innovation in Interprofessional Education and hearing the hunger for better quality and impactful education for nurses and physicians, the Macy Foundation Faculty Scholars Program could not have been developed at a more critical time. Therefore, getting back to your question, being invited to be a member of the inaugural National Advisory Committee for Macy Faculty Scholars Program was an absolute dream come true at the right time.

HJH:

Well, it's been a dream for both of us then, Afaf, because your personal background and that lovely summary of your background is the perfect match for this program. So let's hear from our colleague Kelley with the same question. Kelley Skeff, how did you decide to pursue a career as a medical educator?

Kelley Skeff, MD, PhD (KS):

Thank you, Holly. It's always wonderful to be with you and to listen to Afaf relate her life because it's so powerful to see how education can do so much for so many. For myself, I think I've always loved the process of teaching and helping others. In preparation for this, I thought back to being in the fifth grade when I was so proud that the teacher asked me to help work with the things on the board. So I think my love of teaching goes way back to elementary school. I've also, I think I thank my family for this, have felt a deep level of appreciation for the importance of respect to everyone.

And thus, in joining medicine, it includes respect for everyone in the entire healthcare system, from patients to the healthcare team of nurses and doctors and all of the folks who it takes to help a healthcare system work. So this combination of medicine and the loveliness of the healthcare system, and the love of teaching came together. I was fortunate to be at Stanford when they started the very first fellowship in general internal medicine in 1976, and I was chosen, fortunately, to be one of the first

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fellows. And my mentors then — and I would want to mention them because they were both remarkable in how they helped others —

Harold Sox Jr. was my division chief, and Daniel D. Federman was the chairman of medicine at Stanford at that time. Both of them recognized my love of teaching, but they also recognized, and here's the importance of a mentor, that I could benefit from the study of the science of teaching. And so, with their advice, I went to the Stanford School of Education, where I was fortunate to meet scholars in the study of education and to realize how many of them and how wonderful they were. And this led us to develop an international teacher training program with the goal of helping other dedicated teachers in the field of healthcare be more effective.

And along the way, the Macy Foundation became a partner funding our work in dissemination on our dissemination model of faculty development. So being on the Macy Advisory Board is a great honor for me to both contribute to the work of a foundation that had supported our work and to give me the opportunity to do what I love, which is helping others contribute to medical education. The opportunity to work with the remarkable faculty who now become Macy Scholars is both a great honor, and it's consistent with our goals to have medical educators be as effective as possible.

Now, finally, I would be remiss in not mentioning the importance of the larger field of medicine in society. Being able to combine the two noble fields of education and medicine is a true opportunity. And medical fields, with their emphasis on both science and humanity, still represent a most noble calling. And this has led to my current interest in the issues of the distress of medical providers and how we can help educators address this problem. So altogether, the Macy Foundation Scholars Program melds together these wonderful background opportunities that I've had and that I'd like to pass on to others.

HJH:

Wow. Thank you, Kelley and Afaf. That was very inspiring listening to each of you describe that. And Kelley, your reference to Hal Sox and Dan Federman, passing along their wisdom to you, Kelley Skeff, it's a perfect example of mentoring lineages from one generation to the next. And I'd actually like to turn to that topic of mentoring because I know that both of you mentioned one of the things that you're doing as part of our Macy Foundation National Advisory Committee is having the time and space to serve as mentors for our Scholars. So Kelley, let's start with you. Could you just say a word about your experience as a mentor to our Macy Faculty Scholars, now dating back more than a decade?

KS:

Indeed, it would be a pleasure. Well, as you might imagine, it's a delight to work with dedicated, insightful, inspirational, and creative medical educators who are driven to help one another in this medical field and to help the entire field rise to a new level. Some focus on the communication process, some focus on the care of the underserved, others focus on the leadership of organizations, the healthcare prisoners, and the dissemination of educational programs across the country.

What you see is a variety of aspects of medicine that are being helped... that variety is being helped by these wonderful people who are driven to help each other. And as a mentor, I get to share my own excitement about the importance of their work and support them in challenging times and share the experience and wisdom that comes from being in the field of medicine and medical education for several decades.

In addition, because of my own current interest to assist the field at a challenging time when physician wellness and burnout are taking on great importance, these so-called mentees, the Macy Scholars, are

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consistently helpful to me in providing insight into the challenges that they feel and that they observe at this time in their career. So the opportunity to be a mentor is a real exchange process where I would consider us near-peers. Now, there are a few years between where I am now and where they are, but I would still like to call them near-peers as we both work together to try to improve medicine and medical education.

HJH:

Well, Kelley, I think it goes without saying, the Scholars will be honored to be considered near-peers of yours. Afaf, what about you?

AM:

Thank you. It's always inspiring to hear my colleague Kelley speak about medical education, and the same is for nursing education, and the same is for our nursing scholars. I truly enjoy this part of my role with the Macy initiative. It's been such an honor. It's been such a privilege to be a witness and part of the Scholar journey, medical and nursing Scholars' journeys from review of application to interviewing to seeing them as leaders in the country.

Of course, the journey of each of the people I have mentored, whether in medicine or in nursing, may be different, but what they all have in common is their passion not only for their own project or their own careers, but it is their passion for the vital role that a good education, a fair education, a just education, an innovative education would ultimately do to patient care and the quality of care that is provided. They never lose track of that connection between their nursing journey, educational journey, and the medical educational journey and the quality of care for patients.

So mentorship has been really about, for me, about learning with and from each other—learn with and from each other through listening, supporting, advocating, dealing with challenges, surmounting inevitable barriers, but also anticipating roadblocks along the way and providing some strategies, perhaps to prevent those roadblocks or to deal with the roadblocks. I always see my role as a mentor as a cheerleader, nurturing their potential, rather, redirecting them when they are off course.

And then also a challenger when needed. I saw my role also as helping to open doors and build new connections between the Scholars and other leaders in the country, nationally and internationally. And I saw my role as helping them function up to their full capacity, even beyond what they think they are capable of doing. Because I think what mentors do, they see more in their mentee sometimes than the mentee sees in themselves. We always pause to focus their work on their ultimate career goals. And what I really enjoyed greatly is challenging them to uncover their philosophical principles and their theoretical frameworks for their work; we are always working on that.

As a mentor, we focus always on three areas. First: trials, tribulation, and opportunities of academic and clinical careers. Two: strategies and options in navigating and integrating multiple roles and multiple demands—this always comes up in our conversations. *How do we do that—ourselves and our roles?* And the third area is choosing among the many career options and opportunities that our Scholars invariably meet. There are lots of forks in the road.

So mentoring definitely is a lifelong relationship, and it's a personal relationship and a professional relationship, and I think our Scholars see it that way. I continue to hear from all my mentees, even after they finish their scholarship or after they, at different times in their career, when they meet the new forks, they want to discuss it or new challenges. But mostly, what is really enjoyable is then, when I hear

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from mentees about their successes, and they want to celebrate with me. So mentorship is the soul and the spirit of what education is about.

HJH:

Oh, Afaf, that was beautiful. I think I'd sum that up with: cheerleader, challenger, connector, and then celebration.

So, as I mentioned earlier, both of you, you and Kelley, have been part of this program since before it began, really. So you were both involved in selecting the very first cohort of Scholars. And Kelley, I'd love to hear your perspective on what you have seen change over this now more than a decade. As you know, we have 62 active and alumni scholars in the Macy Faculty Scholar family. So it's different today than it was when you began. What do you see as the biggest differences, Kelley?

KS:

Thanks, Holly. Well, it's been a delight to be a part of this process and this evolution, and one only has to listen a short period of time to Afaf and see the excitement that we have had of trying to give them the benefit of our own experiences and the recognition of the importance that they have in helping the world become a better place. Probably the most dramatic and gratifying observation for me is to watch the mentees become mentors for each other. The Scholars are chosen because of their abilities, their commitment, their enthusiasm. But they, like all of us, are constrained by our own experience and our own colleagues who are often very similar to us.

Well, the Scholars Program has brought together a wide range of experience and knowledge and backgrounds, enabling cross-fertilization across Scholars with nurse Scholars, pure education Scholars, social work Scholars, pharmacy Scholars, and physician Scholars contributing to each other. And at the meetings of the Scholars now, it is clear that there's a wealth of knowledge and wisdom in the room coming from the Scholars themselves and a commitment to each other that truly has created a family caring for and helping each other along the way. So the observation for me is to watch people move from mentee to mentor, and then it becomes a family together, bringing the best out in each one of them.

HJH:

Thank you, Kelley. That was, I think, really, really well said—a beautiful narrative about the history of the program and where we are today. And I think both of you are very well aware that where we are today is trying to take a pivot in the program to focus a little bit more on applicants who are earlier in their career and who represent greater diversity, both as individual candidates as well as the nature of their home institutions. So, Afaf, thinking about the program in its current iteration—where we are right now,—what excites you most about recruiting Scholars who represent this next generation of the program?

AM:

I love this question, Holly, but may I add a couple of things to what Kelley said about the changes that happened over the years?

HJH:

Oh, sure.

AM:

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I'm so excited to see that Scholars are using theory and integrating it all through their work, which is really, you can see that continuously increasing. Also, the resourcefulness of the Scholars in using each other. It's apropos of the mentorship that Kelley mentioned. You see that more. And I love seeing that our Scholars now drive the agenda rather than... more and more they are driving the agenda of what it is they want in mentorship. And, of course, I'll see more interprofessional teams being formed, which is great.

Now, to the next generation and the next phase of Macy's Scholarship Program...the potential of these future Scholars is truly inspiring. I view it with much anticipation. And I'm so excited about it because I think they are going to be making more impactful outcomes, and there are several reasons for that. They come to us earlier in their careers; they will have shorter time in our existing systems and organizations and structure—less time to be socialized into believing that this organization and systems actually work.

So less time to be brainwashed into thinking that these systems work and more time afterwards to really take the scholarship that they have gained from the Macy Scholarship Program to make a difference. But these new Scholars also come to us with many new skills that are related to the future of education: AI expertise, multimedia, more sophistication about interprofessional education, more knowledge about interprofessional education, and team building.

So they come with more collaboration, partnership skills. In addition, and this is really important for this new generation of Scholars: diversity, equity, and inclusiveness are not theoretical concepts for them. They have been part of our society's awareness and reckoning of stigma, of alienation, of marginalization, and of our oppressive structures at every level. They have been part of that dialogue. They have been part of our becoming really aware of that and wanting to make some changes. This is all now part of their DNA. It's in their DNA. It's embodied in them.

They will not shy away from these difficult conversations. They will not be afraid to dismantle the shrines that were made by all of us because they are new to these shrines, and they don't want the shrines to continue. So it's going to be easier for them to destruct these shrines and build new equitable shrines. They are ready to advocate. They are ready to be mentors to others. They are ready to create more equitable structures and to be inclusive and to be inviting.

I don't believe they are going to be part of the solution. I really believe they *are* the solutions for an educational and environmental system for health professionals that's more just, more diverse, more equitable, and more inclusive. Really exciting future for Macy's Scholarship and for the education of health professionals, nurses, physicians, and anybody else in the health professions.

HJH:

Afaf, that was inspiring. That was really beautiful to listen to you speak about. We are almost at the end of our time together, and I need to go in a different direction as we wrap things up. And that direction is, I want to focus very specifically on our current group of six Scholars because, in fact, they are the individuals who I am going to be interviewing one-on-one throughout this season of Vital Voices.

And just to remind you, our current scholars are Drs. Sara Arter, Andrew Dwyer, Lanre Falusi, Brenessa Lindeman, Geoff Stetson, and Rahul Vanjani. So I'm going to give each of you perhaps your biggest challenge ever. And that is, when you think of that group of Scholars, I'd like you to sum up the group using just three words. So, Kelley, let me turn to you and invite you to give me the three words that you would use for that group of Scholars.

KS:

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Well, I hope you'll allow me to give an introduction to the three words.

HJH:

Okay.

KS:

And that is that I've had the opportunity to sit in the room with these six folks and observe them being humble and willing to share their insights and challenges with each other, and also willing to ask for and receive help from each other. And those brought me to the three words of committed, open-minded, and caring.

HJH:

Beautiful. Thank you. Kelley. Afaf, what about you?

AM:

I'll give the preamble after I tell you the words.

HJH:

Okay. Okay.

AM:

They are fearless. Fearless to try new ideas and get into the box or out of the box. They are centered. They know who they are, and they have incredible confidence in their leadership abilities and optimistic about the future. And they are integrative. They integrate theory, practice, education. They integrate professions. They integrate cultures. They integrate ethnicities and discipline.

And most importantly, they love theory, and it's integrated all through their work. And I think because of these characteristics, I think they are going to be so impactful, and they are going to change what health education for the profession is going to be like. They are fearless, centered, and integrated, and impactful.

HJH:

Wonderful. This is just a terrific prelude to the current season of Vital Voices, which may well turn out to be my personal favorite season, given those six words that the two of you have come up with. So, unfortunately, my time with both of you has come to an end. As always, it is such an honor and privilege to listen to and learn from each of you and your remarkable experiences as medical and nursing educators. But perhaps even more importantly, it's your remarkable humanness that just oozes through everything that you say and do.

We are absolutely thrilled that you remain engaged members of our National Advisory Committee and are active members of the Macy Faculty Scholars Program. I could not be more inspired having listened to you today, and I know that our audience is going to consider this a real treat to have the chance to hear from two luminaries in your respective fields. So thank you again for the time that you spent with me today, and I know that we are all looking forward to this season of Vital Voices when we will hear directly from our Scholars. Thank you.

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AM:

Thank you very much, Holly.

KS:

Thank you so much.

HJH:

Thank you for listening, and we hope you'll share this conversation with others. You can find this and all other episodes of the Vital Voices podcast on the [Macy Foundation's website](#). We hope you will subscribe to the series so that you won't miss my upcoming conversations with the 2023 Scholars. And finally, please be sure to [sign up](#) to receive email updates from the Macy Foundation, updates about our podcasts, our webinars, funding opportunities, and other ways to connect with the Foundation. Thank you!