

Kathryn Reed, MS, PA-C, EMT-P, RYT
Founder of the National Society of Black Physician Assistants

By Karla Perelstine, Student Editor

For as long as Kathryn can remember, she was always interested in becoming a doctor. Her entrance into the medical field took a slight detour though, as she began her studies at the Swanson School of Engineering at the University of Pittsburgh. Much to the dismay of her professors, Kathryn's thoughts kept returning to the field of health care and she eventually changed her major to emergency medicine, graduating as a certified paramedic in 2014.

Kathryn's first job out of college was with Northwest EMS in McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania. Kathryn enjoyed working on the ambulance and talking to the patients she was transporting. However, the moments she spent with the patients were fleeting and did not provide her the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in their long-term medical care. She longed to be part of the solution and practice preventive care before a patient's health became critical. In the role of a physician assistant, she knew she would be able to provide proactive support. Thus, she enrolled in the University of Pittsburgh School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences where she graduated from the physician assistant program in 2016.

While a physician assistant student, she noticed there were not many in her cohort that looked like her. Having grown up in a racially diverse family and being told by her peers that "she was not Black enough", Reed was acutely aware of society's diverse make-up. Therefore, it was no surprise that as a student, she noticed there were very few physician assistants of color. A 2019 survey report by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants indicates that only 3.6% of physician assistants are Black. Reed was interested in creating change within the Department of Physician Assistant Studies to make it a more inclusive academic space

for people of color. Working with her advisor and with support from the department, she set out to implement lasting change. Most recently, the Department of Physician Assistant Studies has introduced a policy to further advance the climate of inclusivity among students, staff, and faculty. Kathryn's input has significantly impacted the initiative.

Kathryn has continued her advocacy beyond the university, and in 2019, founded the National Society of Black Physician Assistants, becoming their first president. The goals of the organization are to diversify the physician assistant student body, specifically increasing the number of Black students; develop and maintain a national community of Black physician assistants; educate Black communities; and improve health outcomes in all communities with an emphasis on Black communities. Since its inception, the society has implemented a mentorship program and has hosted virtual events for physician assistants in training. Reed says that “if students don't feel supported by their respective departments or groups, seeking advice from professional organizations or mentors can make bringing the conversation up the chain of command less daunting.”



Kathryn Reed is currently practicing in internal medicine on an acute inpatient behavioral health unit at the Veterans Affairs Hospital in Pittsburgh. She also serves as an adjunct professor in the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh. To maintain a healthy work life balance, she facilitates accessible gentle yoga classes as a 200-hour registered yoga teacher. Kathryn currently teaches online at <https://coachkeemlivertraining.as.me/schedule.php>