

The Journal of the National Medical Association: A Voice for Civil Rights and Social Justice

| Sheena M. Morrison, MPH, and Elizabeth Fee, PhD

THE NATIONAL MEDICAL

Association, the first national organization of African American physicians, was formed in 1895, with Robert F. Boyd as its first president. The aims of the organization were to share information about scientific and health issues as they affected the African American community, to encourage the aspirations and professional advancement of its members, to refute racist scientific theories, and to fight discrimination in all areas. As the fifth president, Charles V. Roman, aptly stated:

Conceived in no spirit of racial exclusiveness, fostering no ethnic antagonisms, but born of the exigencies of the American environment, the National Medical Association has for its object the banding together for mutual co-operation and helpfulness, the men and women of African descent who are legally and honorably engaged in the practice of the cognate professions of medicine, surgery, pharmacy and dentistry.¹

To this end, association members held annual conferences and, in 1908, with the support of the Tuskegee Institute and Booker T. Washington, decided to publish the *Journal of the National Medical Association*. Its first issue was published by the students of the Tuskegee Institute in 1909. It has been published continuously ever since.



The Editors of the Journal of the National Medical Association, 1914. Charles V. Roman, MD, is seated in the center. From left to right: John A. Kenney Sr, MD, Walter A. Alexander, MD, Roscoe C. Brown, MD, and Ulysses G. Dailey, MD. Source. History of Medicine Division, National Library of Medicine.

Charles V. Roman, a graduate of Meharry Medical School in Nashville, Tennessee, who had spent most of his medical career in the South and was known for his writing skills and knowledge of history, was elected the first editor of the *Journal*. He would hold the post for ten years. Roman wrote extensively for the *Journal*, both editorials and articles, one of which is excerpted in this issue.² He was ably assisted by the editorial staff shown in this image: John A. Kenney Sr, Walter A. Alexander, Roscoe C. Brown, and Ulysses G. Dailey. Interestingly, Kenney was the personal physician of Booker T. Washington, and Brown would go on to head the Office of Negro Health, a Division within the Public Health Service. All men were prominent physicians in their fields.

The articles in the *Journal of the National Medical Association* document the social, medical, and public health issues of particular concern to African American patients and physicians. As Kenney stated:

Our Association as a whole and members individually must be on the firing line of every movement that has for its object the betterment of conditions regarding health, whether national or local.³

Conveying a similar sentiment, one contributor, William S. Lofton, argued that African American physicians must become “missionaries and apostles of hygiene, sanitation and the prevention of diseases.”⁴

Everyone interested in the history of African American health or health disparities should be pleased to know that the National Library of Medicine has created a digital

archive—with free full-text articles—of the entire run of issues of the *Journal of the National Medical Association*. This should be a valuable tool for researchers. Its papers include topics on nursing, dentistry, pharmacy, medical care, and hospitals, in addition to public health issues. To access the archive please visit <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/tocrender.fcgi?journal=655&action=archive>. ■

About the Authors

Sheena M. Morrison is a PhD candidate with the Department of Sociomedical Sciences at the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University, New York, NY. Elizabeth Fee is with the History of Medicine Division, National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD.

Correspondence should be sent to Sheena M. Morrison, 3805 Kansas Avenue NW, Washington, DC, 20011 (e-mail: smm65@columbia.edu). Reprints can be ordered at <http://www.ajph.org> by clicking the “Reprints/Eprints” link.

*This article was accepted June 23, 2009.
doi:10.2105/AJPH.2009.175042*

Contributors

S. M. Morrison conducted the research. E. Fee and S. M. Morrison wrote the article.

References

1. Roman, C. V. Stated in an address to the National Medical Association in 1908, as cited in Morais, H. M. 1976. *The history of the Afro-American in medicine*. Cornwells Heights, PA: Publishers Agency. This statement became the credo of the Association and would grace the cover page of the *Journal* for a number of years.
2. Roman, C. V. Fifty Years' Progress of the American Negro in Health and Sanitation. *American Journal of Public Health* 100, no. S1(2010): S66–S68. Originally published in *Journal of the National Medical Association* 9 (1917): 61–67.
3. Kenney, J. A. Report of Secretary to the National Medical Association. *Journal of the National Medical Association* 1 (1909): 34–35.
4. Lofton, W. S. Duties of the Profession to the Laity. *Journal of the National Medical Association* 1 (1909): 118–123.