

VIRGINIA ALEXANDER:

AMERICAN PIONEER IN RACIAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

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Senior Division

Group Website

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We have long aspired to pursue careers in the medical field and wanted to find a topic focusing on women physicians in Philadelphia and how they overcame prejudice. Through our research into prominent women physicians, we learned about Virginia Alexander, a leading African American activist and physician in Philadelphia during the early to mid-20th century. Virginia Alexander was a physician, public health researcher, and the founder of the Aspiranto Health Home in Philadelphia, who responded to unfair treatment of Black and white patients and dedicated most of her life to providing better healthcare for Black patients. Her research found correlations between racist treatment, poverty, and mortality. Her work made her one of the most significant doctors during the Black Hospital Movement.

We began our research by examining materials at the Women's College of Medicine at the Drexel Legacy Center Archives. There, we found a book and a video presentation by Vanessa Gamble about Virginia Alexander. We then interviewed Mr. Matt Herbison, managing archivist of the Legacy Center archives and Special Collections at Drexel, who provided us with files including an audio interview of Helen Dickens, in which she spoke about Dr. Alexander. We also visited the University of Pennsylvania Archives to access files about Virginia Alexander, including her financial records, correspondence from medical professionals, and her research publications. We were also able to find articles and books from the JSTOR database for historical context and other significant information through the Friends Historical Library.

After gathering and organizing our research materials, we drafted a website. For the website's design, we used muted dark tones and variations of gold to reflect her significant contributions to the medical field and Black activism. We chose the font "Courier New" because

many of her correspondences were typed. The background features a collage of documents from our research, including news articles, images, and her medical licenses.

Virginia Alexander helped improve access to quality care for Black families during the 1940s. She brought attention to segregation in healthcare through her articles, speeches, and public health advocacy, inspiring other female physicians such as Helen Dickens, the first African-American woman admitted to the American College of Surgeons. Virginia Alexander worked to reform Philadelphia's medical institutions through her Quaker activism and groundbreaking research and reacted to systemic inequities by supporting Black doctors and high quality facilities for Black patients. She helped revolutionize equitable community care through her Aspiranto Health Home. Virginia Alexander was an influential figure who not just benefited the health of Black Americans but challenged the segregated hospital system with a unique perspective.