

**Nneoma Uzoukwu, MPH**

**M3, Lewis Katz School of Medicine**

**National AMWA Member- 2026**



**Bio**

I am a medical student driven by a belief that medicine is most meaningful when it is rooted in community, mentorship, and equity. My interest in healthcare grew from early experiences that emphasized responsibility to others and was later shaped by learning environments that highlighted how deeply social and structural factors influence health. Along the way, I have been guided by mentors who modeled advocacy not as a title, but as a practice, and who showed me the importance of creating space for others to grow. These experiences have reinforced my commitment to women's health and to supporting individuals who may not see themselves represented in medicine. As I continue my training, I hope to become a physician who not only provides care, but also listens deeply, advocates intentionally, and mentors generously, working to ensure that those who come after me experience a more equitable and supportive healthcare system.

**Ubuntu: I Am Because We Are**

With bright, inquisitive eyes my siblings and I gathered around a firepit listening to our late grandfather tell dramatic village tales into the night. My grandfather was determined to never let us forget our Nigerian heritage and African values. The tales he made sure to present to us every night during our yearly summer trips to Nigeria were designed to teach a lesson that he hoped would stay with us as we

went back to America for the school year. After an hour of giggling at his outlandish stories, my grandfather quizzed us on what we learned. “Don’t go into the evil forest without grandfather,” my eight-year-old self-yelled out. My grandfather shook his head and let out a boisterous laugh. “Ubuntu,” he emphasized, “that is what I am trying to teach you.” My siblings and I rolled our eyes as we listened to our grandfather explain the concept of Ubuntu for what seemed like the hundredth time. Little did I know that this concept would stay with me and become one of the most important lessons a mentor would ever teach me.

Ubuntu originates from South Africa and directly translates to the word humanity. It is part of the Zulu phrase meaning “you are who you are because of other people” and emphasizes the importance of putting community above oneself. It was a beautiful concept, but I often questioned what it truly meant to be who I am because of others. It was difficult to understand such a philosophy while growing up in an individualistic American culture that emphasized personal achievement and independence.

I crossed paths with Ubuntu again during my study abroad trip to Tanzania. There, I was fortunate enough to learn more about health issues occurring on the African continent and the solutions being created to address them. I became inspired as I met healthcare providers whose research and prevention programs were making tangible impacts. I began to imagine creating programs of my own that could address similar health challenges.

Towards the end of the trip, my classmates and I visited a remote village located in the mountains. While touring, we stopped at the local clinic, which was a small house converted into a medical facility and run by a single physician. He proudly showed us his makeshift maternity ward, the bell outside that villagers could ring to wake him in the middle of the night, and the small room where he stored medications for all types of sickness. “I have been the only doctor here for over fifteen years and I do everything,” he said.

I was stunned. How could one person take care of an entire village, and why would they want to? When I asked him, he explained that although it was exhausting, his love for the community gave him the strength to continue. He then said, “I wouldn’t be who I am without them.” In that moment, I fully understood the lesson my grandfather had been trying to teach me for years. I saw Ubuntu in action and witnessed what it meant to live a life rooted in service and responsibility to others.

Following my trip to Tanzania, I began to make more intentional efforts to exemplify Ubuntu in my own life. I took on leadership roles across my university that allowed me to mentor younger students, educate peers on sexual health, lead organizations dedicated to increasing Black student retention, and work with administration to implement equity-focused change. I also designed and carried out community health and research initiatives with organizations in both Nigeria and the United States, with a focus on women’s health and health equity. In addition, I pursued a Master of Public Health with a concentration in social epidemiology to better understand how structural inequities shape health outcomes.

Through these experiences, I came to appreciate mentorship as a powerful form of advocacy. I learned from individuals, particularly women in medicine and public health, who not only encouraged me but actively created space for others to succeed. Their guidance showed me that equity does not happen passively. It requires persistence, courage, and a willingness to challenge existing systems.

In this way, my grandfather's mentorship aligns deeply with the legacy of Dr. Linda Brodsky. Dr. Brodsky transformed her personal fight for equity into a movement that empowered countless women physicians. Rather than allowing injustice to isolate her, she used her experience to advocate for fair treatment and create resources that ensured others would not have to navigate medicine alone. Both mentors taught me that advocacy is most meaningful when it extends beyond oneself and creates lasting change for others.

If I were to dedicate a symbol to honor my grandfather's mentorship, it would be Ubuntu itself, a philosophy passed down through storytelling and lived example, much like a song repeated until it becomes part of who you are. It represents everything he instilled in me and everything I see reflected in Dr. Brodsky's work. Ubuntu is not just a belief, but a responsibility to uplift others and to recognize that success is incomplete unless it is shared.

I hope to pay this mentorship forward by becoming a physician who prioritizes equity, access, and advocacy, particularly in women's health. I aspire to mentor students who may not see themselves represented in medicine, advocate for fair treatment within healthcare institutions, and continue developing programs that empower communities. In doing so, I hope to honor the mentors who shaped me and contribute to a legacy that ensures future generations can thrive.

To me, that is the foundation of Ubuntu and the legacy of mentorship I strive to carry forward.