

Ruth

Title: Carrying Resilience Forward

If I had to choose one word that captures my vision for gender equity in medicine, it would be resilience. Not resilience in the simplistic sense of endurance, but in the deeper, collective sense—an inheritance shaped by the women who came before me, and a force that continues to propel women physicians, especially women of color, toward the careers, compensation, and autonomy they deserve. Resilience is what transforms exclusion into advocacy, injustice into reform, and personal struggle into progress. It is the word that echoes through Dr. Linda Brodsky's legacy and the one that defines my own journey in medicine.

Historically, resilience has been the quiet engine behind every milestone for women in medicine. When Dr. Rebecca Lee Crumpler became the first Black woman physician in the United States in 1864, she entered a profession that openly rejected her presence. She was denied hospital privileges, barred from many medical societies, and routinely challenged by colleagues and patients who doubted her competence solely because she was both Black and a woman. Yet she persisted—treating formerly enslaved individuals after the Civil War and writing the first medical text by a Black woman. Her resilience laid a foundation for others such as Dr. Alexa Irene Canady who became the first Black woman neurosurgeon in the United States in 1981. She faced isolation in training, overt racism, and faculty who questioned whether she “could handle the pressure.” But she persisted, becoming chief of neurosurgery at the Children's Hospital of Michigan and a national authority in pediatric neurosurgery. Dr. Canady's achievements were not simply personal victories—they proved that brilliance in medicine is not bound by gender or race. Their stories, grounded in resilience, has opened doors for thousands of women who now see themselves reflected in roles once deemed unattainable.

As a Black woman entering medicine, these histories do not feel distant to me—they form the landscape I walk across daily. Yet my earliest example of resilience came from someone much closer to home: my mother. She immigrated to the United States with limited English proficiency, worked tirelessly to support our family, and eventually became a nurse despite facing language barriers, discrimination, and countless reminders that she did not “fit the mold.” Watching her study late into the night, navigate patients who doubted her accent, and persist in environments that were not designed for immigrant women taught me what determination truly looks like. But while I grew up with a mother who showed me what perseverance meant, there were no examples in my family of women who pursued advanced degrees in science or medicine. So, when I announced at nine years old that I wanted to become a doctor, the path ahead of me was one I had to imagine before I could follow.

During college, that imagined path became a series of demanding real-world tests. I worked unpaid research positions that consumed 12-hour days while balancing coursework—believing, at first, that being grateful for an opportunity meant staying silent about inequitable conditions. Meanwhile, my male peers confidently pursued funded positions from their first semester, supported by mentors who saw them as future colleagues. It was not until I intentionally sought out women in STEM—women who were engineers, researchers, and pre-medical students with ambitions as fierce as their talent—that I learned the true meaning of collective resilience. Together, we navigated environments that often underestimated us, advocated for equitable pay and work conditions, and shared strategies for thriving rather than simply surviving. With their

support, I eventually secured a paid research position that valued my expertise, not my willingness to overextend myself. This moment, though small on paper, fundamentally reshaped how I understood my worth. It taught me that advocating for myself is not an act of defiance; it is an act of alignment with the future I want to build.

This understanding—of worth, advocacy, and resilience—connects deeply to the legacy of Dr. Linda Brodsky. Her fight for gender equity began long before the subject was widely discussed. After uncovering years of pay discrimination at her institution, she pursued and won a landmark lawsuit in 2000, setting national precedent for equal compensation among women physicians. She helped women navigate contract negotiations, leadership structures, and institutional biases that often diminish women's autonomy. As co-chair of AMWA's Gender Equity Task Force, Dr. Brodsky pushed for transparency, mentorship, and systemic reforms. She showed women physicians that resilience is not merely about enduring injustice—it is about challenging it with courage, data, and unity. Her legacy is one of structural change, not silent suffering.

As I look toward residency, resilience remains the word I will carry with me. It will guide me as I evaluate programs not only for their prestige, but for their culture—programs where women are supported, compensated fairly, and given clear pathways to thrive both professionally and personally. It will strengthen me as I advocate for equitable workload distribution, transparent pay structures, and well-defined maternity leave policies that do not penalize women for choosing to build families. And it will anchor me when I begin mentoring future trainees, especially young Black women and first-generation women who may not yet see themselves in the physicians around them. I want them to feel what I often longed for growing up: the reassurance that their dreams are not extraordinary—they are achievable.

Resilience is more than a word; it is a lineage. It is the thread connecting Dr. Crumpler to Dr. Canady, Dr. Brodsky to the women she empowered, my mother to me, and now me to the next generation of aspiring women physicians. It reminds me that while the medical profession has been shaped by patriarchal systems, it has also been reshaped by women who refused to be confined by them.

By carrying this word forward, I honor the women who carved out space for me in medicine and commit myself to carving out space for others. Resilience is the promise that we can—and will—have it all.