

Mary Starke-Harper

Just seven months before her death, in 2006, Mary Starke Harper was awarded a special Health and Human Service Secretary's Award for her exceptional accomplishments in the field of minority health. In her acceptance speech, she acknowledged that she "left home against the will of my parents who thought I should take a job as a housekeeper." Instead she said, "I learned...to pray and how to have confidence, and how to have faith, and how to have patience, and how to bring about change."

Called a "legend" by all who knew her, Dr. Harper was born the oldest of eight children in Fort Mitchell, Alabama in 1919. She is remembered for shining a light on the health care disparities of ethnic and racial minorities and for her advocacy work on behalf of the elderly and mentally ill. Her more than 60-year career included leadership positions at the National Institute of Mental Health, where she served as an advisor to four presidents. She also helped implement the National Institute of Health's National Fellowship Program, which has enabled thousands of minority scientists to obtain advanced degrees.

Early in career, she was director of nursing education at the Tuskegee VA Hospital. Her early experiences led her to become an advocate who fought for better health care for minorities – especially geriatric and psychiatric patients – as well as more ethical research policies.

The UAB Alzheimer's Disease Research Center seeks to extend the legacy and lessons of Mary Starke Harper's life by offering this summer internship program focusing on dementia and neuroscience. By encouraging minority students to pursue health care related careers, the advocacy work of Mary Starke Harper will continue.

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Alzheimer's Disease Center

Harper Summer Fellowship Program 2009

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The Harper Fellows Project was established in 2007 by the UAB Department of Neurology and the Alzheimer's Disease Research Center to provide a unique educational opportunity to minority college students enrolled in Historically Black Colleges in Alabama. The program is intended to offer students entering the junior and senior year of college with a six-week summer fellowship experience focusing on educational and clinical experiences in Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, and mentored experiences in the neurosciences. The Harper Fellowship is intended to serve as a springboard for minority college students interested in attending medical school or graduate school in a health care related field. The primary goal of the Harper Summer Fellowship Program is to encourage talented young minority students to consider a clinical or research career in Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. The Fellowship is named in honor of Dr. Mary Stark Harper (see panel).

Student Qualifications and Application Process

Students considered for the fellowship award are required to be at least rising junior level undergraduates enrolled at a Historically Black College in Alabama. Students must have at least a B average and a major in physical science, biology, social science, psychology or other fields applicable to the study of Alzheimer's disease. Interested candidates should complete a formal application and furnish two letters of recommendations from professors, school administrators or clinicians in the community.

Program Details

- The Harper Fellowship will be six weeks long (Monday-Friday, only) with involvement with the UAB Minority Health Research Center's Summer Enrichment Program (1st four weeks of Fellowship)
- The Fellowship program will begin May 29, 2009.
- The finish date of the Fellowship will be July 10th 2009 (1st week in July no activities)
- Fellows will interact with faculty neuroscientists working in areas of Alzheimer's disease and related disorders
- Fellows will have the opportunity to be involved with clinical care activities within the UAB ADRC and Neurology Department
- Fellowship students receive a stipend of \$300/week
- Housing will be provided (if needed) in the new UAB student dorms
- Fellows will be given a weekly meal allowance

Application

The formal application process will begin March 2, 2009. The Harper Fellowship applications can be obtained by emailing a request for an application to Roy Martin, Ph.D. (rmartin@uab.edu), or by writing:

Roy Martin, Ph.D
UAB
Department of Neurology
Sparks Center 650
1720 7th Avenue South
Birmingham, AL 35294-0017

Dr. Martin can also be contacted at (205) 934-2334 for questions about the Fellowship.

The Fellowship application deadline is April 24, 2009.

Applicants can visit the UAB Neurology website/ ADRC (www.uab.edu/adrc) for further information about the research and clinical activities of the ADRC faculty.