

With Attached Photos: James McCune Smith; Rebecca Lee Crumpler

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## **African American Medical Pioneers Broke Barriers For Themselves and the Underserved Patients *Celebrating Black History Month***

BRUNSWICK, Georgia: February 19, 2021 – February is Black History Month, a time to celebrate achievements by African Americans and a time for recognizing their central role in U.S. history. In honor of Black History Month, Southeast Georgia Health System invites you to read the stories of Dr. Smith and Dr. Crumpler, two African American pioneers who changed the face of medicine. These trailblazing physicians broke barriers for themselves, for underserved patients, and the nation as a whole. More than a century later, they continue to inspire a new and diverse generation of health care workers.



### James McCune Smith (1813-1865)

Despite being born into slavery in New York City in 1813, from a young age James McCune Smith set his sights on becoming a doctor. After being denied admission to American colleges because of his race, he attended the University of Glasgow in Scotland, where he earned his bachelor's, master's, and medical degrees by age 24. He returned to New York City in 1837 and became the first African American doctor in the United States to establish his own practice. As a physician, he treated patients of all races, and served as the chief doctor at the Colored Orphan Asylum in Manhattan.

Dr. Smith was a skilled linguist, author, apothecary, and the first African American to run a pharmacy in America. Dr. Smith devoted much of his life to working with abolitionists to end the enslavement of black people in the South. A member of the American Anti-Slavery Society, Dr. Smith worked alongside Frederick Douglass, and helped found the National Council of Colored People in 1853. He died three weeks before the passage of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which abolished slavery.

### Rebecca Lee Crumpler (1831-1895)

Born Rebecca Davis in 1831, Dr. Crumpler grew up in Pennsylvania, where her aunt provided care for the ill. She attended a prestigious private school, the West Newton English and Classical School in Massachusetts. In 1852, she moved to Charlestown, Massachusetts, to work as a nurse. "I early conceived a liking for, and sought every opportunity to relieve the suffering of others," wrote Dr. Crumpler in her groundbreaking 1883 publication, *A Book of Medical Discourses: In Two Parts*.



After graduating from the New England Female Medical College in 1864, she became the first black female physician in the United States. That same year, she opened a medical practice in Boston. After the end of the Civil War in 1865, Dr. Crumpler moved to Richmond, Virginia, where she worked for the Freedman's Bureau, the federal agency charged with helping slaves make the difficult transition from bondage to freedom. Eventually, she settled in Hyde Park, New York, where she wrote the book that became one of the first medical publications written by an African American. She dedicated her book, which focused on maternal and pediatric care, to nurses and mothers.

At Southeast Georgia Health System, we believe that embracing diversity is one of the pillars of excellent care. Each day, countless individuals of every race, gender, and age enter our facilities seeking help—and to provide that help. Drs. Smith and Crumpler are an inspiration to all who face adversity, seek diversity, and persevere forward. Their legacies live on in hospitals and clinics, doctors' offices, schools, universities and research laboratories.

*For more information about Southeast Georgia Health System, visit [sghs.org](http://sghs.org).*

**ABOUT SOUTHEAST GEORGIA HEALTH SYSTEM**

Southeast Georgia Health System is a not-for-profit health system comprised of two acute care hospitals, two long term care facilities, two comprehensive Cancer Care Centers and multiple specialty care centers, including orthopaedic and spine care, joint replacement, breast care, maternity, outpatient rehabilitation, sleep management and wound care. The Brunswick Campus Cancer Care Center is accredited by the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer and offers the only CyberKnife® M6 with MLC technology in Georgia. Additionally, the Southeast Georgia Physician Associates medical group includes more than 140 providers working in 20 different medical specialties at more than 50 locations. In 2020, the Brunswick Campus was rated High Performing in COPD and Heart Failure by the U.S. News & World Report. For more information, visit [sghs.org](http://sghs.org).

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