



2nd Annual National APP Week

TOGETHER TOWARDS TOMORROW

PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CLINICAL NURSE SPECIALISTS



HEATHER CLARKE, DNP, CNM, LM, APRN, FACNM

President of the American College of Nurse-Midwives

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Heather Clarke received her master's degree as a nurse-midwife from Columbia University and her doctoral degree from Frontier Nursing University, in 2014. Throughout the course of her career, she has largely provided care to marginalized Black and Brown women and families in diverse settings including home, birth centers and hospitals. She has also served as midwifery faculty in several programs including Columbia University, SUNY downstate and Frontier Nursing University. Today she is a member of the nurse-midwifery faculty at the University of Pennsylvania, school of nursing.

Early in her midwifery career, Dr. Clarke was highly motivated to provide reproductive choice for perinatal clients. In 1984 she helped to develop the first out of hospital birth center at a full spectrum women's health center that honored choice by provided abortion and primary care. In the late 1980's Dr. Clarke became keenly aware and concerned about the racial disparities in MCH and sought opportunities to address them. In 1989 she was founder and President of Birth Choices, a community-based organization which provided education designed to inform and empower Black and Brown women and adolescents about their bodies and reproductive choices. She advocated for increased access to quality health care and social support services to Black and Brown women and families in North Central Brooklyn. Birth Choices was also committed to promoting midwifery, particularly to mentor and encourage Black women to enter the midwifery profession. They provided webinars for midwives and other birth advocates, culminating in a conference at Columbia University "The Art of Midwifery; Is it Your Calling?" The conference was a tremendous success, attracting several hundred midwives from within the NYC Tri state area.

In 1991 Dr. Clarke served as a perinatal health consultant to a leading Community Based organization in the first round of the Healthy Start program. Dr. Clarke provided technical assistance by creating an integrated Midwifery Community Based Model of Care. The project sought to reduce high rates of IMR and LBW by eliminating fragmentation of medical care, increasing access to a variety of important support services and nurse-midwifery care in collaboration with a local midwifery education program. Under the guidance of Dr. Clarke, five FOHCs and two local hospitals coordinated services with many CBOs to improve access to both medical and social services for families in North Central Brooklyn. Over the course of two years, both PTB and LBW decreased by 10% within the community.

Later in the 2008, Dr. Clarke returned to the same community as Project director in a CDC funded project to expand upon the previous work. She developed a perinatal risk assessment screening tool to enable providers and CBOs to efficiently identify women who were at risk for poor perinatal outcomes. She developed a Community Based Service Navigation and Referral System (CBSNRS) and worked with a technical software company to digitalize the screening and referral tool. The system proved very effective to increase the speed of screening and referral for social and medical services. Subsequently NYS adopted the model as a prototype which they implement statewide to screen and coordinate services for consumers with various medical chronic and emergent conditions.

In efforts to discover solutions that built advocacy, Dr. Clarke began to study and integrate pre and perinatal psychology into her work beginning in 2002. The discipline provides a platform to integrate the sciences of epigenetics, neuroscience, and psychology to understand embryological morphology, perinatal trauma, early childhood development, social and structural drivers and persistent racism and analyze their combined link to increasing the risks of maternal morbidity and mortality, especially for Black and other marginalized people.

In 2014, Dr. Clarke decided to further her studies by obtaining an advanced degree. Her doctoral work focused on creating a model to mitigate MCH disparities by promoting stress reduction and resiliency building during preconception, the prenatal and postpartum periods. To support her doctoral work, she served on the CDC's preconception workgroup panel and was instrumental in the development of standards for preconception healthcare. She has continued to promote her ongoing efforts to improve perinatal outcomes, decrease racial disparities and empower clients to advocate for quality, respectful care and to become more resilient through her academic work, national and international presentations.

In May 2022 Dr. Clarke was inaugurated as the President of the of ACNM. As her primary goal, Dr. Clarke hopes to expand the ability of educational programs to expand the annual number of graduates. Additionally, Dr. Clarke is committee to increase the utilization of midwives and their perceived value by establishing midwives as primary care reproductive health care providers. Finally, she intends to promote models of community based integrated midwifery led care with the capacity to provide a multitude of social support services which address preconception and perinatal mental health, and prenatal bonding to help give all families A Healthy Start.