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Allen Pope Interview, School of Medicine, Wright State University

Allen Pope

Wright State University - Main Campus

Oris Carter Amos

Wright State University - Main Campus

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Profiles of African-Americans That Helped Shape Wright State University

Interview with Allen Pope

Date of Interview: 1993

Interviewer: Oris Amos, College of Education and Human Services

Interviewee: Allen Pope, School of Medicine

Oris Amos: Hello and welcome to another series of profiles of African-Americans who have made outstanding contributions to Wright State University. I'm pleased that Professor Alyce Jenkins invited me to do a guest shot with Allen Pope. Good morning Allen.

Allen Pope: Good morning Dr. Amos.

OA: So good to see you.

AP: Thank you.

OA: I'm so happy that you've agreed to talk about your role in the School of Medicine. I know the School of Medicine has had its ups and downs and you were there most of the time. But before we talk about your role here at Wright State, let's talk about what you were doing before you came to Wright State.

AP: My training is in education, urban education specifically, and I was working as an administrator with the Dayton Board of Education, director of its Model Cities Program, to upgrade the quality of its education with the inner-city schools. And I was with the Dayton board for approximately seven, eight years and then I heard about the job opening here at the School of Medicine and I applied and was accepted into the position.

OA: Now were you here during the time it was first beginning and there were several controversies about whether there should be a School of Medicine at Wright State?

AP: Yes. Well, I was certainly within the community and reading about the controversy surrounding whether or not there should be another medical school within the state of Ohio, specifically here in Southwest Ohio. And I started with the founding dean, John Beljan, on his administrative staff in the early 1970s.

OA: And what role were you playing at that time in the School of Medicine?

AP: My role originally was Director of Special Projects, which, as the title denotes, covers just about everything. But specifically I felt that the Dean wanted me to serve as a liaison person with the community, specifically the African-American community. Particularly since I had strong ties with some of the political leaders as well as the community leaders within inner-west Dayton.

OA: Now that was your role then. What is your title now and what are some of the responsibilities that you have now?

AP: Well I have also evolved with the School of Medicine with respect to my responsibilities. Presently, my title or titles is Director of Minority Programs and Financial Aid as well as Assistant Professor in the Department of Community Health.

OA: Now, with your doing financial aids for students, it's my understanding that you have done an outstanding job of getting scholarships for students in the School of Medicine. Talk a little about your jobs that are involved with getting financial aid for students, and some of the organizations with whom you are associated with.

AP: Given the high cost of medical education, financial aid is a key component of the medical school, and because I have served as a consultant with Health and Human Services, I think that has helped the School of Medicine get some federal grants and scholarships that possibly we would not have received, given the fact that we were a new and developing school. Also, because of my ties within the Dayton community, I work closely with the Gem City Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Society, which is an organization or a society composed of African-Americans who are working to ensure that students go to professional schools. In addition to that they have provided financial support since 1979, I believe. They normally give two or three scholarships to an African-American attending the School of Medicine, and this effort took some negotiations given the fact that most of the members of that organization are graduates of either Meharry or Howard, and they had no connections or ties with the School of Medicine, so my job was to convince them that it was a deed worth undertaking, and that it would benefit African-Americans attending the School of Medicine.

OA: Now, with most of us at the university or those of us that have worked at the university must often provide or get grants and funding from outside sources, and many times they look at how much money you can bring into the university. Just thinking about your role here in that area, how much money would you say that you've brought into the university directly or indirectly?

AP: Well, I would say with respect to the financial aid program, with grants and scholarships, we're probably looking at in the neighborhood of about \$150,000 per year

of funds directed to the School of Medicine from local sources as well as from national or federal sources.

OA: In the beginning period of getting the School of Medicine off the ground, I know C.J. McLin played an outstanding part. Can you tell me how he became involved and what were some of the roles he played in seeing that we got the School of Medicine here at Wright State?

AP: Well, if you know anything about the late C.J. McLin, he was the type of individual that was best working one on one or with small groups on a particular issue, and a lot of the things that he did were kept close to the chest. However, it was my understanding that because he was, one, president of the elected black officials in Columbus, as well as a member on two key committees with the state assembly, C.J. had the power to make the swing votes necessary for the legislation and the funding to come forward with respect to the medical schools that were being considered. Because if you look at the state of Ohio and you draw a grid, you will notice that the first new medical school was established in Toledo. That's northwest Ohio. That was followed by northeast, and Wright State in the southwest. Northeast took on the approach that we would develop a consortium of Akron University, Kent State, and Youngstown in developing a medical school, instead of trying to duplicate what the Medical College of Ohio did, which was to address primary care but to use the traditional model of having a university hospital. However, Toledo or MCO did not address primary care, nor did it address the underrepresentation of minorities at medical schools, nor were the established or traditional schools addressing the underrepresentation of minorities. When you look at the traditional schools, those were Case Western, Ohio State University, and the University of Cincinnati. So Wright State wanted to address primary care as well as the underrepresentation of minorities, and those were the key issues that helped fund the Wright State School of Medicine.

OA: So one of the goals then for the School of Medicine was to involve more minorities training to be physicians?

AP: Yes.

OA: Has that goal been accomplished, or is it being accomplished?

AP: I think so, in that we normally rank in the top 20% of medical schools with respect to the admission, retention, and graduation of minorities. We traditionally lead the state of Ohio or our sister medical schools in that effort. So I think we have addressed that one particular goal. With respect to primary care physicians, we normally graduate about 60-70% into one of the primary care specialties, which of course is family practice, internal medicine, pediatrics, and psychiatry, and some even consider OB/GYN.

OA: Where are your physicians located who graduate from Wright State, especially the African-Americans? Do they stay in the area, do they go away, what happens?

AP: Well, a combination of both. Since the school's inception in 1976 when we accepted the charter class, we've graduated 82 African-Americans. Presently there are 15 practicing in the Dayton metropolitan area, and their specialties vary, but a significant number of these individuals are in primary care. But it does vary from primary care to anesthesiology, orthopedic surgery, etc.

OA: You were there in those early days of the medical school, were there other African-Americans who were playing parts in the development? And I know there are satellite facilities all around the Miami Valley, what's the representation of African-Americans in the satellites and other centers?

AP: Well, to look at it in a historical perspective, and going back to C.J., African-Americans who worked with C.J. on the establishment of the School of Medicine were doctors Carl Jenkins, Dwight Pemelton [sp], and Edmund Casey, who were on the CSU Board of Trustees, and they were instrumental in approaching Wright State and Miami University in forming the consortium that was to duplicate some of the efforts that were put forth in northeast Ohio, except they determined that the medical school should be located on one site, and Wright State was the site in which the medical school was chosen. So these individuals played a key role, along with C.J., in forming the coalition that was necessary to get Wright State off the ground.

OA: I know you have directed *Horizons in Medicine*. Will you describe that program and tell us whether that works in getting more minorities or African-Americans in the School of Medicine, and maybe give us some examples of some of the students who have gone through the program.

AP: Certainly. *Horizons in Medicine* was the result of a community-wide effort to address the underrepresentation of minorities in medical school. That community-wide effort, individuals on that committee consisted of politicians- C.J. McLin- business persons, such as Clarence Bowman, community members and the like, as well as representation from CSU. *Horizons in Medicine* was the result of all of these discussions and meetings that went on for a period of time, and sometimes they were quite confrontational, because medically schools historically did not have community input as far as programming or to give them direction in terms of which way they should be going to address a particular problem. So *Horizons in Medicine* started right after the School of Medicine was established, it was started in 1979, and we accepted into the first program 20 students, and since then we have had approximately 250 participants in the program. I'm proud to say that 90-95% of the participants have gone on to college and graduated. Of these numbers, 15 are attending or have graduated from the Wright

State School of Medicine, and they are as dispersed across the country as other students who have participated in other similar programs.

OA: Are there some students who stand out in your mind? Give us a little case study if you can think of some who have just been very different or very outstanding or whatever.

AP: Well, one in particular- and unfortunately, I do not have a photograph of her- but that is Joi Findley. She graduated in 1991 and she is presently doing her residency training in OB/GYN in Canton, OH. She was a participant in Horizons in Medicine, as well as the fact that her father has served on the Horizons in Medicine Advisory Committee since its inception, and the class gave the parent a plaque at the graduation ceremony in 1991, so I'm pleased to make mention of Joi Findley. But some of the other graduates that I would like to mention that were outstanding students and were just pleasant people to be around, one is Dr. Alan McGee, a graduate of Wright State who is presently an orthopedic surgeon in Indiana. Next, I would mention Dr. Gary LeRoy, he has a family practice here in Dayton. Next, I would like to mention Dr. Derrick Jeter, general surgery, he's finishing up his residency training in Columbus. In this last class that graduated this past June of '92. We had doctors Victor DeLoach, Francis Webb, and Leonard [Igza]go], all three of those went into O.B., and [Lanning] Brown, who decided to go into emergency medicine in Michigan. All of those individuals I feel were outstanding students, and in addition they worked on community projects. They worked on health fairs, they did programs for students in school, they also served as program assistants in my Horizons in Medicine program, so they were not only good students, but outstanding individuals.

OA: And are they keeping in contact with you and Wright State?

AP: Oh, certainly. I receive calls from my graduates all the time. Letting me know what they're doing, whether they're married, if they have children, and those kinds of things.

OA: I know you- I think I remember you received a special plaque from some of your African-American students with whom you'd worked. Would you talk a little bit about that and how you felt about that?

AP: Yes, I believe the award, which was given my name, The Allen N. Pope Award, for individuals who promoted the medical education of African-American students at Wright State. I believe that award was initiated by the class of 1982, of which Alan McGee, as I mentioned earlier, was a member of that class. And I've received numerous other plaques and awards throughout my professional career, but I consider that award given on behalf of the students, in my honor, as my outstanding contribution to this community.

OA: There's nothing like students saying you're okay.

AP: Correct.

OA: You mentioned other plaques and awards and honors. I know you received the President's Award for Excellence in Service. When did you receive that?

AP: I received award that a couple years ago, and that award, the President's Award in Excellence, was given in the area of Human Relations. And I guess that sort of typifies my efforts in being able to get along with people and seeking consensus concerning problems and the like. So I also consider that an outstanding honor to receive the President's Award for Excellence.

OA: And you received another award from the Gem City, and you might explain what the Gem City group is and the award that they presented you.

AP: Yes they presented me an award at one of their annual banquets, and—well let me back up a moment. As I mentioned earlier, that is a professional group made up of African-Americans in the Dayton Metropolitan Area. And they felt the need to form such an organization or society because early on, in the late-1940s for example, they were not accepted or were not welcome to become members of the Montgomery County Medical Society. So they felt a need to form an organization to address some of their concerns. And they have since joined forces with the Thurgood Marshall Law Society, and they have an annual scholarship banquet in which they give out scholarships to students attending both Wright State and the University of Dayton. And of course they give out awards and I was so honored at one of their banquets a couple of years ago to receive one of their awards for my outstanding contributions to the students here at Wright State.

OA: Now are there physicians who are in the Gem City group who are also working with the School of Medicine here at Wright State in any capacity?

AP: Yes, there are a few of the Gem City members who are on the faculty here at the School of Medicine. One, for example, one of our recent graduates Dr. Harry Smith, he's in internal medicine, so he decided to pursue academic medicine. Dr. [Gidding Adebule] is a faculty member, family practice; very active with the Gem City group and has served on several committees here at the School of Medicine, such as the Promotions Committee, the Ethical Standards Committee. And another one that comes to mind again is Dr. Carl Jenkins, who's in family practice in Springfield. And Dr. Jenkins was also president of the Academy of Medicine, which is made up of scientists and physicians in the Dayton area, who has as one of its primary goals to promote the well-being of medical students here at Wright State University.

OA: In thinking back, you mentioned that Central State and Miami had representatives on the advisory committee or the planning committee. Are these two universities still involved in any way with the School of Medicine?

AP: They're no longer involved to the level in which they were at the beginning. For example, the presidents of Miami and Central met, I believe quarterly, with the Dean to address issues and the like. I don't believe that committee or council—whatever it was called—continues to meet. However, on the Admissions Committee, which is a key committee with respect to the Medical School because that is the committee that admits students, who determines who gets in, who does not get in, Central State has always had representation on the Admissions Committee. And I believe the first member on the Admissions Committee from Central State University was Dr. Melvin Johnson, who is currently Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Central State. And presently, the two representatives from Central State are Drs. [Al Sleeter] and [Shepherd Smith].

OA: Are there students involved with the School of Medicine from Central State or graduates of Central State?

AP: Yes, in doing some brief research in preparing for this program, I went back through some of my data files and was pleased to note, to my surprise, that we have had nine graduates from Central State University who have graduated from Wright State.

OA: That's great! Marvelous.

AP: And—

OA: Are they in this area?

AP: Three of them are in the Dayton-Springfield area and the others are in Ohio.

OA: I know we have a School of Nursing and I'm not sure how many African-American nurses we have and if there are African-American nurses that you know about who are now working, still working at School of Nursing.

AP: Well one...well historically, unfortunately...nursing schools and medical schools have not worked well together. And I even encountered that when I first arrived at Wright State because I said, well if I'm going out recruiting African-Americans to medical school, I may encounter some who are interested in nursing. So I met with the administration at the nursing school, and they were not interested in having a joint recruitment effort, joint brochures and the like, because why should I visit, for example, Morehouse, which is a historically black college in Atlanta, and someone from the School of Nursing would follow and go down there also so that would be duplication of effort. But again, we were not able to work out any arrangements or combinations on that effort. But since then, they have hired African-American faculty, and one comes to

mind who serves on a lot of committees, both within the community and here at the university, is Joy Burgess. She's an outstanding young African-American female who is truly dedicated.

OA: Now are there other African-Americans in the School of Medicine who are doing similar kinds of financial efforts that you are doing or are you the person who's in charge of the financial part of—

AP: Well I'm in charge of the financial aid services but in the Office of Student Affairs/Admissions, we do have another African-American, a female, Jackie McMillan, and she is director of all of our recruitment efforts, and she also works in the financial aid area, on the admissions committee, and she also sits on several other committees, particularly addressing retention efforts at the School of Medicine.

OA: I know in your recruitment and in your financial aid searches, you belong to a number of organizations, state and nationally, and you have to be on the road a good deal to be sure to be there to get the financial aid. Would you discuss some of the state and/or national organizations to which you belong?

AP: Well I guess at the state level, we have a minority affairs group that meets on a regular basis and because of its location, we normally meet in Columbus or at Ohio State, and we're looking at the statewide effort to increase the number of African-Americans coming into medical schools. But as it relates to financial aid, I am a member of two national committees. One in particular is the Committee on Student Financial Assistance. I'm pleased to serve on that committee because most of the members are from older or traditional medical schools, and I'm able to get Wright State's point-of-view across to the committee and to try to get some of the regulations that come out of Washington, particularly from the Department of Education, get those points across. As a matter of fact, I was in Washington last week meeting with a representative from the Department of Education and was pleased to learn that two major loan programs have increased their annual as well as their aggregate amount, and they will go directly medical schools. One in particular will be increased from \$4,000 per year to \$10,000 per year and the other from \$7,500 to \$8,500 per year. So it takes some out of your schedule and it's demanding, but I think we have to find the time to serve on certain committees and become members of certain organizations, if we are to make an impact in the area in which we work or within the area in which we are concerned. And again, with the rising cost of medical education, it's very important to have input to those institutions, those agencies in Washington that's—later on, it's going to have a direct impact on whether or not students, and African-Americans in particular, will have sufficient financial aid to finance their medical education.

OA: I know your role as the financial aid and minority affairs but you also wear another hat: you're also an assistant professor for community medicine. I think I said that correctly?

AP: Yes. Yes.

OA: What does that involve? Talk a little bit about your teaching.

AP: Well because of my administrative workload, I do not teach within the department anymore. That is an appointment that started with the Department of Postgraduate Medicine and Continuing Education when I first arrived at Wright State, but that department has since been dissolved and supposedly merged with Community Health, and that was—I was more active in that department. But the Community Health Department, we do meet quarterly and discuss issues related to community health. But usually it's more of a planning and assessment than actually teaching within the department.

OA: We usually talk about the future when we interview people. What do you see the Medical School in the next five years or in your relationship with the School of Medicine?

AP: Well I'm an optimist, and I would like to see the enrollment of African-Americans, not only at Wright State but throughout the country, reach a level that would gain parity by the year 2000, meaning there would be sufficient African-American physicians to address the needs of the medically underserved. And as you probably know, the percentage of African-Americans is only 2.5%, and if you look at our numbers nationally you're looking at about 15 to 20% of the total population. So we have to go some if we're going to reach parity by the year 2000. So I would like to see that happen and to take steps in that direction, along with, you know, the other medical schools within the state and within Ohio. That I think should be everyone's goal who works in medical education.

OA: You did mention that Wright State is right up there with the other universities in graduating minority physicians. Is that correct?

AP: Correct.

OA: And you would like to see it increase and our becoming number one should be a priority.

AP: That's correct. And I think one of the key reasons for that is because of the groundwork laid early on by the individuals I mentioned earlier, C.J. McLin; that the school should address the underrepresentation of minorities in medical education, and the construction of the Admissions Committee, which is made up as I mentioned earlier,

individuals from Central State; it has good minority representation, female representation. It's a large committee, so about twenty-four to twenty-six members. It's not your typical admissions committee because most admissions committees are made up of physicians and basic scientists with little or no input from feeder schools or the community at large, and at Wright State that has always been in place. So a candidate gets a good review, a thorough review with respect to his or her credentials. And we not only look at the cognitive factors but we look at the non-cognitive factors: Is this a single parent? Did he or she work? The number of hours that they work, the academic load that they carried. And so you put all of those factors in the equation before you reach a decision instead of just looking at the GPA and the MCAT scores, which is very easy to do and is very easy to screen out individuals who are well-qualified to be physicians.

OA: Well Allen, just judging by your work, your grants, your funding, your awards, you've made a marvelous contribution to Wright State's School of Medicine. You were there early, at the beginning, with the first Dean, Dr. Beljan. You saw the groundbreaking—

AP: Yes.

OA: —and you've seen—how many years is this for you at the Medical School?

AP: Well, it surprises me but I've been with the Medical School for my fifteen years

OA: I think it's wonderful that Professor Alyce Jenkins has this program doing African-American profiles. Otherwise the history of who were there, of African-Americans, to help Wright State grow and develop might get lost. So it's marvelous to have this opportunity to talk to people who were there at the beginning of programs who made outstanding contributions. And so for Alyce, in summarizing our talk today for Alyce, I would like to thank you for your presentation and talk with us about your contribution to the School of Medicine; you've been there, you've done great things. Thank you very much for being with us today.

AP: Thank you!

OA: I certainly enjoyed your comments.

AP: Thank you, thank you.

OA: Thank you very much.

AP: It was quite interesting to discuss the historical perspective of the School of Medicine because I was surprised at some of the events that occurred that few people know about, some of the individuals involved early on before the groundbreaking occurred. So I was delighted to be here.

OA: It's good to summarize the history and to look back and see that we were here when Wright State was being developed.

There were three other outstanding African-Americans who were here at Wright State helping in the development of the School of Medicine. Regina Borum was the administrative assistant to the founding dean of the Medical School. Regina was at Wright State University from 1975 until 1990. James Hazel, PhD, came to Wright State in 1976 as Associate Clinical Professor, Department of Community Medicine, and Director of the Frederick A. [White] Center. He was at Wright State University from 1976 until 1983. Charles Payne, MD, Professor of Medicine, Department of Internal Medicine, and Chief of the Pulmonary Critical Care Division at the VA Medical Center, came to Wright State in 1978 and is presently associated with Wright State University School of Medicine.