

**EDUCATION**

## **Dr. Margaret Aguwa: Professor affects thousands with message**

Margaret Aguwa, D.O., associate dean for community outreach and clinical research in the Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine, has worked tirelessly to encourage members of minority and nontraditional groups to take responsibility for their own health and to consider careers in the medical field.



As part of that mission, Aguwa produced a video titled "Breast Self-Examination: A Touch of Life" that has been viewed by osteopathic medical students, physicians and patients nationwide, perhaps resulting in early detection of breast cancer in scores of women.

In 1995, Aguwa detected a lump when examining her own breasts. She underwent treatment and is a 13-year breast-cancer survivor.

"We never know why or how God leads us in different ways," says Aguwa, also a professor in the university's Department of Family and Community Medicine. "Having gone through that and survived, I realized there was no breast-cancer survivors group here, so we started one. We meet on a monthly basis to talk and discuss our experiences.

"Something you think you're doing for someone else may turn out to be for you," Aguwa says. "This has been one of the highlights of my life."

The second born in a family of 10 children, Aguwa grew up in Enugu, Nigeria, where her father was a nurse and her mother a homemaker. She came to the United States to attend Loma Linda University in 1968 and earned her medical degree at the University Health Sciences College of Osteopathic Medicine, in Kansas City, Mo., in 1973. She completed a master of public health degree at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, in 1979.

"You help out in the house, with caring for the brothers and sisters, and they still all kind of depend on me," Aguwa says of her childhood. "It was our parents' vision that we all had a good education. You worked, you went to school, you came home and helped in the house and studied. Anything we did, the family was involved."

Aguwa credits her family's roots in the culture of the Igbo people with the value her parents placed on education. While here, she met and married Okechukwo Aguwa, who also is an Igbo from Nigeria, with whom she has raised three sons. Despite her busy life, she helped found the more than 100-member Igbo Women's Association of Michigan.

Early in her career, Aguwa became concerned about national studies that found women of African descent tend to be diagnosed with breast cancers that are very severe. She dedicated herself to educating medical students and physicians on the importance of encouraging their patients to do regular breast self-examinations. Additionally, she has spoken on the topic of breast self-examination at countless universities, public health fairs and other venues.

"The issue is really educating all women on the importance of their partnership with their physician, and we also need to educate physicians to treat their African-American patients with the same kind of fairness and equality of care that they do with all of their patients."

Dr. William Strampel, dean of MSU's College of Osteopathic Medicine, says Aguwa has influenced countless women to take charge of their health. Eight years ago, she founded a summer on-campus program for high school students called OsteoCHAMPS, to encourage disadvantaged teens to pursue health careers. Several OsteoCHAMPS alumni have gone on to medical school at MSU and elsewhere.

Students at the College of Osteopathic Medicine established an endowed scholarship in Aguwa's name in 2000. She has been honored for exemplary performance in promoting diversity at MSU.

And in April, she was selected as the first recipient of the Sadia Abbasi Award by the Women's Center of Greater Lansing. The award was created to honor people who have made significant contributions to women's health.

"She's been doing those kinds of things since before it was in vogue, before people were beating on the drum for this," Strampel says. "It's had national impact within the osteopathic profession. I would say she's impacted at least thousands of patients. It's a multiplier effect."

## More information

**Residence:** Okemos

**Occupation:** Professor and associate dean for Community Outreach and Clinical Research, Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine

**Education:** Bachelor's degree, Loma Linda University; doctor of osteopathic medicine, University Health Sciences College of Osteopathic Medicine, Kansas City, Mo.; master's degree, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

**Family:** Husband, Okechukwo; three adult sons

**Why honored:** For promoting wellness, particularly breast self-examination, among minority and African-American women, and encouraging disadvantaged students to pursue health careers

*Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News*