



**DR.  
ANGELA  
KYEI,  
Dermatologist  
Extraordinaire!**

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Eric Benson

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**T**he road to success for Dr. Angela Kyei (pronounced "chay") was paved with its share of obstacles, but with a strong family and a persistent spirit she has created a life many would envy.

The strength of Dr. Kyei's character can be traced to her parents Michael Oforu Mensah and Georgina Mensah, natives of Ghana, West Africa. Kyei is their first born child, but she spent her early years in Ghana with extended family. After receiving a scholarship to study in the US, Dr. Kyei's father left his young family and settled in Houston, TX with the hope of creating a better life for his wife and daughter. One year later, her mother joined him in Texas. At the tender age of nine, Kyei was reunited with her family in Texas and met her baby sister for the first time. Soon after her arrival the family relocated to Scranton, Pennsylvania where Kyei's formative years were spent.

The first of Angela's obstacles was entering school with a language barrier – she did not speak English. The failure to communicate left her believing the "teachers didn't take me seriously," and led to her being labeled "a challenge." Not only did Kyei not speak the language, she was also a minority for the first time in her life. These combined issues could have a devastating effect on most people, but not Kyei.

Education was a huge priority in their household, and performing well in school was a requirement for Angela and her siblings. But her father was not accepting any excuses for poor grades. He was adamant that her being the only black person in her school did not matter.

In 2nd and 3rd grade, Angela was placed in an English as a second language (ESL) class to help her better understand the English language and to help her grades improve. Exasperated and determined to boost her communication skills and her grades, Angela began watching Sesame Street, which taught her to speak English like her American classmates. But it was a no cakewalk.

Frustrated and disappointed because she knew her parents expected to raise stellar children, Angela submitted to strict and recurrent tutoring sessions with her father. With his guidance, she worked diligently and her language skills gradually began to blossom.

Angela is grateful for her family and the teachers who saw her potential, and she knows that behind any successful person you will find people who sowed into them. The high expectations of her parents fortified Angela's resolve to reach her full potential and one of the best consequences of her fierce determination was success. As her language

skills improved, her grades improved and people started paying attention to this once challenged, now high achieving student. Angela was finally making her long-awaited academic breakthrough.

At a young age, Angela knew she wanted to become a doctor, but didn't know what area of medicine she would pursue. After completing her undergraduate studies at Princeton and graduate studies in Public Health at Yale, Angela had a conversation with her father expressing some reservations about attending medical school. Her father had a way of lessening his children's reluctance towards trying something new and he was a master at convincing them that those things were within their reach. He told his daughter, "If you want to be a doctor, you can be a doctor!"

Before long, Angela applied to Case Western Reserve University's (CWRU) School of Medicine and was accepted into their general medicine program. Part of the medical school's curriculum was to allow students to "rotate" through the different divisions of medicine for a one month trial. This exposure would help them determine which specialty they eventually would pursue. Angela signed up for a rotation in the dermatology program, and after one month she knew she had found her passion. The competition was steep with over 300 students applying for a spot to train in the highly coveted field of dermatology. Only four students would be selected, and Angela was one of the four.

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During her second year of medical school, Angela was introduced by a mutual friend to a fellow medical student, Mark Kofi Kyei. Sparks flew, love bloomed and soon they were married. The following year, during her fifth month of pregnancy, Angela was contacted to interview for a position in the Cleveland Clinic's Department of Dermatology. She aced the interview and got the job.

After a few months of celebrating the joys of graduation, landing a job with the Cleveland Clinic and the birth of daughter Nana Aduako Kyei, Angela had to say goodbye to her husband. He had just completed his oncology residency with Cleveland Clinic and was off to begin his fellowship training in Little Rock, Arkansas. God sends his angels, and he sent Angela's mother to take the baby back to Scranton, PA while Angela managed her first year of residency in Cleveland Clinic's Department Of Dermatology.

While working full-time and attending classes, Angela traveled six hours every weekend between Cleveland and Scranton, PA to spend time with her daughter. After a year of this hectic schedule, mother and daughter were reunited. Angela went to bed each night with her daughter at 8:30p and got up at 3:30a to study. But life as she knew it was changing. The challenges of being a minority in corporate America were beginning to rock Angela's world.



Angela never experienced racism while growing up in Ghana. For her first nine years of life, she was never conscious of the color of her skin. Not until she came to the United States. Angela is convinced that native born Africans have enjoyed a privilege that, sadly, most African-Americans have not nor may ever experience. Angela tells the story of her father who was born and raised in Ghana. Those who knew him could see that he possessed the brains, talent and confidence to pursue and be successful in any career that he chose. He had no psychological or emotional limitations imposed upon him by his society, so he believed he was capable of doing anything he cared to do, without restrictions. As a result, he became the first in his family to graduate from college, and eventually earned his doctorate degree in Accounting.

Shortly after joining her family, Angela was deeply hurt by being treated like she was less than others, and was confused by a society whose judgment of her was based not upon her contributions, but based solely on the fears of people who believed that skin color matters. In time, Angela learned that in order to survive, she must keep her eyes on the prize, or be consumed by retaliating against unfair judgments made by intolerant people.

She fought with herself about her own feelings – of feeling like a coward for not striking back at the people who made racist comments about black people. But she knew she had to remember her goals, stay focused and work hard to be accepted by her peers. Angela also learned that to be successful in corporate America, you have to be strategic

in fighting your battles, and after years of working hard and smart, Dr. Angela Kyei became the first African-American doctor to work in Cleveland Clinic's Dermatology Department in over 20 years. She didn't stop there - she went one step further and became the first African-American female to earn the coveted position of Chief Resident of Cleveland Clinic's Department of Dermatology.

As a practicing dermatologist, Dr. Kyei and her colleagues began to study African American skin and hair loss conditions that their patients were experiencing. They found that patients complained mainly of dark circles beneath their eyes, uneven, blotchy skin tones and droopy skin. The research team looked more closely at the effects of pigmentation on skin and found that melanin-rich skin secreted chemicals that fight the aging process. It was confirmed that African American skin tends to show signs of aging at least 10 years later than Caucasians.

Dr. Kyei developed a strong passion for finding solutions for patients suffering from hair loss, and in 2011 founded the Multicultural Skin and Hair Center in the Dermatology and Plastic Surgery Institute at the Cleveland Clinic. The Center, one of only a few in the country, offers specialized treatment for skin and hair conditions more common to women and men of color, regardless of ethnic heritage.

*Demonstrating that hard work and perseverance are key to success, Kyei also led a study in 2011 that examined a trend of hair loss in middle aged African American women.*

The study indicated a higher propensity of hair loss in women that regularly braid their hair, and wear hair weaves. While these may not be the only factor, it does play a role in the loss. Based on this study Dr. Kyei cautions, "African American women to consider refraining from wearing weaves, braids or other hairstyles that place stress on the scalp. These hairstyles, especially when worn by children and worn for extended periods of time, can cause hair bumps that may become infected."

Most importantly she says women should, "stop and think about what you're doing with your hair, and you have to look at your children's hair." She said it is important to think of the long term effects, explaining, "African Americans begin putting relaxers and chemicals in their children's hair early. You have to start thinking about what might happen later on." She continues to conduct ground breaking research today in this area.

Word of Dr. Kyei's successes at the Cleveland Clinic traveled throughout the community, prompting a call from Dr. Oscar Saffold, a semi-retired, African American Dermatologist serving Greater Cleveland. Dr. Saffold approached Dr. Kyei to discuss taking over his practice. In 2014 Dr. Kyei accepted Dr. Saffold's offer, and in the spring of 2015, Dr. Kyei started Cosmopolitan Dermatology, a private practice that provides quality care for skin, hair and nail conditions of all skin types.

Dr. Kyei has also developed a line of skincare products that address everything from acne to aging skin. The products are available in her office and online at [www.cosmodermatology.com](http://www.cosmodermatology.com).



Dr. Angela Kyei with some Cosmopolitan Dermatology staff

Dr. Kyei continues to juggle a very busy work and family schedule with her husband Dr. Mark Kyei, and together they are raising stellar children of their own, nine year old Nana and four year old Mark.

Cosmopolitan Dermatology provides a wide range of services including medical, surgical and cosmetic dermatology. If you or someone you know is experiencing hair loss or needs advice concerning difficulties with their skin, call Dr. Kyei's office to schedule an appointment today.

**Cosmopolitan Dermatology**  
MEDICAL | SURGICAL | COSMETIC

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