

# Michelle Henry, MD



## traditional roles

A self-described hard worker, Dr. Henry recalls when a male in management at one job told her he was concerned her rate of hard work would preclude her from having a family. Then he asked her to limit outside work and add more hours to the office. "Women often feel pressured or shamed into assuming 'traditional roles' or abiding by someone else's timing for their lives," she says. She calls for self-advocacy and says that, rather than "wound us," negative encounters should "make us sharper, hungrier for success, more intentional in our approach, and more willing to listen and help others."

>> Specializing in Mohs surgery, lasers, skin of color, and cosmetic dermatology, Michelle Henry, MD is currently a Clinical Instructor of Dermatology at Weill Cornell Medical College and a dermatologist at Laser and Skin Surgery Center of New York. She attended medical school at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, and completed her residency in dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City, where she served as Chief Resident.

Despite these accomplishments, what she is most proud of hits close to home. "Although it is embarrassing at times, my mother can't go one day without shamelessly sharing my accomplishments both large and small," she shares.

With a supportive mother and mentors who led by example, Dr. Henry learned the importance of having a spirit of inquiry, resiliency, and tenacity, which, in addition to clinical proficiency, helped her become a thought leader. She spoke about the importance of speaking up and speaking out for gender equality in dermatology. "Inequalities in medicine are very much alive and will only change with acknowledgement, focus, and attention," Dr. Henry says.

### How did mentors help you become the dermatologist that you are?

**Michelle Henry, MD:** I have had many mentors, some of whom were a part of my training and others whom I

have never met but their impact on our field helped me become the dermatologist I am today. Beyond sharpening my diagnostic and clinical skills, these mentors showed me how to handle unique challenges faced by women in medicine. Through example, they showed me how to gracefully handle difficult patients who are unfamiliar seeing a female as a physician or in a position of authority. They taught me the importance and power of self-advocacy and not to settle for unequal treatment. They taught me to ask for what I want and that when I am denied something I deserve not to hesitate to renegotiate. They taught me that all of my differences are my strengths.

Mentorship is so important. We need more formal opportunities to allow for residents to have exposure to a diverse group of female physicians. I am a member of the Women's Dermatologic Society; we often share our daily hurdles.

### What do you consider your greatest professional accomplishments?

**Dr. Henry:** That my patients trust me and see me as a part of their family. That residents find my teaching to be high yield and trust me to help guide their careers.

### What was your greatest challenge? How did you overcome it?

**Dr. Henry:** As physicians, we must always put patient care ahead of our ego

or personal concerns. Because of this programming, however, we often forget to advocate for ourselves in the work place. I think that women may be more likely to take on more work than we can handle to benefit the team, and we may accept lower wages because our primary focus in attaining work satisfaction may not be financial. We must always remember that if we don't take care of ourselves, we cannot take care of our patients.

### How do you achieve career-life balance as dermatologist?

**Dr. Henry:** As dermatologists, we tend to give everything to our patients and our careers, leaving little for ourselves. When you love your job, it's quite easy to become submerged in it. I found that I had to schedule and protect self-care in the same way that I do work meetings and obligations. I truly believe that this has made me a better physician. Physician burnout is real and scary; we must preemptively take steps to protect ourselves. I schedule working out and meditation sessions through the week as protected time on my calendar.

### What still needs to change for women in dermatology?

**Dr. Henry:** Although times have changed, and there are many more women in dermatology, power structures have not changed. Studies have shown that women still make less than men and we need to address this in a meaningful way. I remember asking a hiring director why he paid a female dermatologist less than the male dermatologist with the same position and responsibilities and he said that the woman did not ask for more. In that moment, I became more intentional about asking for what I need and vowed never to forget to advocate for myself. ■