



RURAL
Heart and
Lung Study



Dr. Ervin Fox is the State of Mississippi Principal Investigator for the RURAL Study. He is a noninvasive cardiologist at the University of Mississippi Medical Center and serves as the Medical Director of the Clinical Non-Invasive Laboratory. He is an experienced cardiovascular epidemiologist with 20 years of extensive research in complex chronic heart, lung, and blood disease working with large community-based NIH-funded cohorts including the Jackson Heart Study and the ARIC study. An interesting fact is that Dr. Fox is a native of the Mississippi Delta (near Panola County) and his mother's family is native to Oktibbeha County. Dr. Fox is the 2011 recipient of the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers and the 2021 faculty award for Diversity and Inclusion for the University of Mississippi Medical Center.



Dr. Felicia Caples serves as the Project Manager of the Mississippi Core of the RURAL Study. She is also a Visiting Assistant Professor at Jackson State University in the College of Health Sciences and Department of Health Policy and Management. From 2016 to 2020, she served as Director of Healthy Linkages at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. She received her PhD from Jackson State University in Public Policy and Administration, a Master of Healthcare Services Administration from Mississippi College, and a Bachelor of Science from Belhaven University. She and her spouse reside in Gluckstadt, Mississippi.



Dr. Frances C. Henderson is a Consultant to the Principal Investigator of the Mississippi Core of the RURAL Study. From 1998 to 2013, she served in part-time and full-time positions with the Jackson Heart Study including: Special Assistant to the Principal Investigator; Co-Director of the Examination Center; and Deputy Director. From 1988 to 2003, Dr. Henderson was Professor and Dean, School of Nursing, Alcorn State University in Natchez, Mississippi. She is a graduate of: Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana; University of California San Francisco Medical Center School of Nursing; and Nova University of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Dr. Henderson is semi-retired and resides in Millbrae, California.



Sonja R. Fuqua, PhD, RN has over 35 years of community-focused nursing experience and is currently the Director of Clinical Quality for the Community Health Center Association of Mississippi. Serving 10 years as Manager of Research and Recruitment for the Jackson Heart Study, she led the team that amassed a cohort of over 5,300 African American participants. Dr. Fuqua brings her expertise in community engagement to the RURAL Study, as well as her passion to empower and educate so that others can make positive lifestyle decisions to improve their quality of life.



Abril A. Grant has over 19 years of experience working in the healthcare field. She has spent 15 of those years working with healthcare research. She also received an Associate Degree in Science and training on working with the IRB at UMMC on community-based research and diverse populations. She currently holds the position as a Research Outreach Specialist with the Mississippi Core of the RURAL Study.



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Dr. Akachi Agor is a Diversity Fellow to the Mississippi Core of the RURAL Study. She is a Diversity Supplement Awardee for the RURAL Study focusing on the facilitators and barriers of community engagement for epidemiologic research in rural MS communities. She has a degree from William Carey University College of Osteopathic Medicine located in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Akachi received a Master of Biomedical Science from William Carey University College and a Bachelor of Science from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She is now a first-year intern in Internal Medicine at Redmond Regional Medical Center in Rome, Georgia and will follow that up with a Dermatology residency at East Virginia Medical School.



Yulanda Haddix is a native of Starkville, Mississippi and a graduate of Rutgers University in Camden, New Jersey. Along with educating youth who were incarcerated and experiencing disadvantage, she also served on numerous committees in her free time as Vice-President of the Philadelphia Eagles Wives Association, New Jersey Mayor Youth Council, New Jersey Child Assault Prevention Coordinator, New Jersey Judicial Board for Rutgers University in Camden, and The National Coalition for 100 Black Women. She continues to serve on the Starkville Mayor Youth Council and is a Board Member of the Golden Triangle Boys and Girls Club. She currently works at EMCC as a WIOA Youth Career Navigator and is a State of Mississippi Certified Workforce Trainer.



Eileen Carr-Tabb received her Master of Arts degree in Communications and her Master of Science degree in Health Promotion from Mississippi State University. After receiving her education, Eileen worked as a Disease Intervention Specialist, Senior to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Later, Eileen returned to Starkville, MS to a career as a Community Health Educator for the Mississippi State Department of Health.



Jacqueline Ellis grew up west of OKTOC RD in Bethel, Pine Grove, and Mt. Olivet Church Communities. Educated in Starkville Public School and Oktibbeha County Schools District, Mississippi State University, and Troy State University. Jacqueline currently presides over a 501(c)(3) Community Education group (EAEOCS), and strives to enhance the educational perspectives on community history and culture, health, fitness, and community education.



Reverend Darrell Dixon Jr. is a native of Clarksdale, MS and serves as Pastor of St. Matthew Church in Lambert, MS. Darrell earned a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from Delta State University in Cleveland, MS and a Master's Degree in Economic and Workforce Development from the University of Southern Mississippi. After working in banking, he served as legislative staff in the United States Senate in Washington, DC before leaving that career for other pursuits. He now uses his talents and skills to develop individuals and organizations as a Program Specialist with North Delta Planning & Development District, Inc.



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Dr. Tammy T. Taylor, a native of Panola County, earned her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from the University of Mississippi before pursuing a career in healthcare. She began her nursing career at Northwest Community College in 1993 and became a registered nurse in 1995. While working full-time as the charge nurse at Baptist Memorial Hospital, Dr. Taylor continued to further her education. Dr. Taylor currently practices at a private cardiovascular clinic in the MS Delta diagnosing and treating patients with heart conditions that abruptly ended her father's life at the age of forty-six. She wears many hats and currently serves as the Lead Volunteer for the National Patient Advocate Foundation (NPAF).