

Honoring National Deaf History Month

Insights

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In celebration of National Deaf History Month, Hooper, Lundy & Bookman recognizes the accomplishments of [Judith Ann Pachciarz \(1941- \)](#), the first deaf person to earn both a Ph.D. and an M.D.

Dr. Pachciarz lost her hearing at two-and-a-half years old, after suffering from encephal meningitis, an inflammation of the brain that can cause extensive nerve damage. Navigating a world that often seemed at odds with her dreams of becoming a doctor, Dr. Pachciarz encountered barriers that could have stifled her aspirations, but with unyielding determination and a thirst for knowledge, she refused to be defined solely by her disability.

Growing up, Dr. Pachciarz attended hearing schools while taking lip reading classes. Despite low expectations of those around her, including a high school instructor who tried to stop her from taking chemistry, Dr. Pachciarz graduated seventh in her high school class. Continuing her education, Dr. Pachciarz majored in microbiology and zoology at the University of Illinois, pursuing the pre-medicine track. Dr. Pachciarz went on to earn her master's degree at the University of Illinois in 1965 and then her Ph.D. in microbiology and immunology at St. Louis University in 1971.

While teaching veterinary science at the University of Kentucky from 1974 to 1979, Dr. Pachciarz was encouraged to pursue her dream of becoming a doctor, which became more of a reality when the [Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) was passed. It took Dr. Pachciarz 17 years from her first application to medical school until the time she was accepted to the University of Louisville School of Medicine in 1979. Through the development of technology such as telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDD) and the efforts of students in the bioengineering department, who were able to modify an oscilloscope to enable Dr. Pachciarz to "see" heart and lung sounds instead of listening for them with a stethoscope, Dr. Pachciarz received her medical degree in 1983.

Dr. Pachciarz went on to become a chief resident in pathology for five years; completed a fellowship in transfusion medicine and blood banking; was a laboratory director; and became the hospital pathologist and director of blood transfusion services at Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science in Los Angeles.

Known as "Dr. Judy", she most enjoys mentoring others with disabilities, in order "to provide them with the support and enthusiasm that she was often denied as a young student." Her advice to others is: "Don't make the mistake of assuming that because someone is missing something, they don't have the ability to do something."

Dr. Pachciarz continues to champion the rights of individuals with disabilities to pursue their academic passions without constraint. Her legacy serves as a beacon of hope, illuminating the path for future generations of disabled scholars who dare to dream big. Dr. Pachciarz's journey is a testament to the power of resilience, the triumph of the human spirit, and the transformative potential of education to break down barriers and pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable society.