



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, November 12, 2020

For more information contact:

Ben Roberts
Director, Public Relations & Communications
O: 229-312-5180
C: 229-343-7499
benroberts@phoebehealth.com

New Chief Medical Officer Brings Patient Safety Expertise to Phoebe Putney Health System

Albany, Ga. – As a little girl growing up on her grandparents’ farm in rural Mississippi, Dianna Grant had big dreams. “You could see the stars at night, and I was always told I could reach the stars,” she recalls. The odds were stacked against African American girls in the segregated south, but Dianna never felt her future was limited. “I was very blessed to be born into a household of very progressive-thinking people. I was never told there was something I couldn’t do.”

She played football with the boys who lived nearby. “They remain my good friends to this day,” she said.

Dianna and her sister integrated the local school system. “My teachers wouldn’t pass out my papers with the rest of the students. They would fold them and hand them to me at lunchtime. My classmates thought, as a black girl, I couldn’t be smart, and it would destroy the myth if they found out my grades were better than theirs.”

And she had plenty of good role models to emulate. “My grandmother would always get in the truck and drive to town to see her sisters. In her, I saw a woman who always did what she wanted to do,” she said. “We always had a black doctor, a black dentist, a black lawyer. So, for me, you could do those things. I never thought it wasn’t attainable.”

At the age of 12, during a visit to a hospital in Jackson to see an aunt being treated for cancer, Dianna’s destiny was sealed. “We were sitting in the waiting room, and my grandmother said, ‘There’s not enough colored women doctors. You’re real smart. You should be a doctor.’”

Dianna started attending an Upward Bound education program every Saturday at nearby Tougaloo College, and her grandparents worked with the director to design a special curriculum

just for her. Clearly, it worked. As a junior in high school, she scored so well on a college admissions test that she quit the high school where she never felt welcome and enrolled as a full-time student at Tougaloo. “The school superintendent later tried to make up for that,” she said. “He asked my grandfather a number of times if they could give me an honorary diploma, but my grandfather always refused.”

As an 18 year-old, she earned a prestigious national scholarship that allowed one student from a historically black college or university to spend a year at the University of California at Berkeley. “You talk about a fish out of water. I showed up with a matching hat and pantsuit while all these other students were walking around with no shoes on.” But she dedicated herself to her studies. “I prayed to God to let me pass, and I told Him I would never go back across the Mississippi River if he did,” she said with a laugh. “Berkeley took away any doubt I had about my intellect. I think the reason I got into med school was because I did so well there.”

After finishing her undergraduate degree at Tougaloo College, Grant attended medical school in Chicago where her mother was living. “I just found it to be the most exciting time of my life for learning,” she said. Not only did she receive incredible hands-on training while serving as chief resident at Cook County Hospital, one of the largest public hospitals in the country, she also met the love of her life. She’s now been married to podiatric surgeon Winston Burke for 37 years.

Dr. Grant started a family medicine practice in Chicago with two other young physicians and began doing groundbreaking work. Decades before it became accepted best practice, they developed care pathways, setting up standardized treatment plans so all patients with a certain condition – such as hypertension, diabetes and arthritis – received the same care. “We were really doing population health and didn’t know it,” she said.

Prominent healthcare organizations took notice of Dr. Grant’s success and innovation, leading to new career opportunities. She has served as chief medical officer and in other physician executive roles for organizations in Chicago and Memphis for more than 20 years, at one point helping build and open a new public hospital in Chicago. “There were so many different things to oversee, that was like earning an MBA on the job. They put together a great team, and I just loved it. When you enjoy what you’re doing every day, your productivity just flows. I think being here at Phoebe will be the equivalent of being there,” she said.

At Phoebe, Dr. Grant will serve as the first system-wide Chief Medical Officer, a role recently created to provide clinical oversight and guidance for the entire health system. “I am confident Dr. Grant will be a strong advocate for our employed and independent physicians and provide outstanding leadership for the medical staff across all of our hospitals. I couldn’t be more excited to welcome her to our team,” said Scott Steiner, Phoebe Putney Health System President & Chief Executive Officer.

Dr. Grant will also lead important safety initiatives, including Phoebe’s journey to become a High Reliability Organization. “Dr. Grant brings a long history and experience in creating cultures centered on safety, built on exceptional employee and patient relations. Her unique expertise will help Phoebe strengthen our Safety First commitment. Additionally, Dr. Grant’s expertise in

community health and data analytics will assist in our work to expand access to care and improve the health of our communities across all of southwest Georgia,” Steiner said.

Dr. Grant is thrilled to be back in the south and excited to be an active part of the community she looks forward to serving. “As I was interviewing for the position, it just felt right, and when my husband came, it sealed the deal. This place made him happy,” she said.

Even as busy physicians at the peaks of their professions, Dr. Grant and her husband raised three successful children. Their son is an actor, and both daughters work in healthcare. One is a critical care nurse, and the other is a pharmacist. Their children didn’t grow up on a farm in the rural south, but – like their mother – they were raised to reach for the stars. “We are all part of this universe,” Dr. Grant said. “If you listen to it and go where you’re supposed to go, you will find your peace and happiness.”

###