A Healthy Combination: Ruqaiijah A. Yearby Will Direct J.D./MPH Program

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Clear, people need to understand the laws and who actually has the authority to step in. That was one of major problems in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Should the federal government have stepped in sooner? Did they have the authority to do so? You definitely need people who have expertise in law as well as public health to deal with these situations.

Yearby comes to Buffalo from Loyola University, in Chicago, where she held a joint appointment in the School of Law and the Stritch School of Medicine. A biology major as an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, she earned her master of public health degree from Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, in Baltimore, and her law degree from Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, D.C. Her resume also includes periods in private practice, as assistant regional counsel for the federal Department of Health and Human Services and a clerkship in the U.S. Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit.

At Loyola, she did extensive work in bioethics and on issues of racial disparities that affect access to health care. As part of the school’s Access to Health Care Initiative, she helped develop a course focused on increasing access to health care through health savings accounts, Medicaid and Medicare; chaired a symposium on health care access focusing on immigrants; and worked to give students more opportunities to get involved in the community.

She is currently preparing a major research study examining whether race is a factor in the quality of long-term care an elderly patient receives.

“A lot of what I do focuses on how we provide care to the elderly, which is a very vulnerable population,” Yearby says. “As the baby boomers age, it is going to be a factor in the quality of long-term care. These populations still remain without the indigent, disabled and elderly, yet these populations still remain without access to quality health care. Thus, granting access to health care is a continuous process.”

Yearby thought about going to medical school, but changed her mind after she received a fellowship to go to South Africa to do public health research. “That definitely changed my outlook,” she says, “because I originally wanted to be a physician to help patients. In public health work, however, I could work on global issues and improve the lives of thousands rather than improving the health of one patient or 10 patients.”

Yearby and her husband, an officer in the Navy, are parents of a 1-year-old son, Malcolm.
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dence in ordering such a recall, the state
issues, such as who should take prece-
food, brings up “lots of public health law
on the news without seeing another
our food supply safe. You cannot turn
to the epidemic of violence, and making
concerning bioterrorism, putting an end
to the need more people with this par-
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School's J.D./master of public health
program. Her appointment is jointly
School this fall to teach and to direct the

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