Dr. Joseph Daniels is remembered as being soft-spoken, very conscientious about the task, life and journey of an African American physician and very caring. He loved the National Medical Association, and was quite important in helping to develop the West Michigan Medical Society in Grand Rapids, as one of the founding members. He served as the Parliamentarian and attended the House of Delegates meeting at the National Medical Association as a delegate.

Even when his steps became shorter, his thinking capacity continued. Dr. Daniels never missed a NMA meeting, attending the Psychiatry Section, until the last two years of his life, as his health and strength made it difficult for him to travel.

Dr. Daniels was concerned about the plight of the African American male adolescent and adult. He understood how tumultuous life could be and how hard it is for the males, because there are constant distractions that serve to interrupt their dreams, goals, and achievements. As a member of Messiah Baptist Church, he continued to be involved in some way in the organizing and planning for the annual African American Conference. A psychiatrist, Dr. Daniels cherished, treasured, appreciated, understood and emphasized the importance of education in being able to provide guidance out of a life of poverty and brokenness. He practiced at Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services, 300 - 68th Street SE in Grand Rapids. He understood that violence is not only what happens in the world, but also in Grand Rapids.

He would remind us that attention is brought to the neighborhood, but violence is sometimes a symptom of one’s illness, of the economy, or could be the result of people not taking advantage of opportunities presented them — their not understanding being prepared as opposed to thinking of themselves being lucky or not lucky. Dr. Daniels was very giving. No matter when I called, his wife Shirley would say, “Joe, telephone.” He would pick up and address any conversation or concerns I had.

Dr. Joseph Daniels entered into eternal rest on Monday, January 14, 2013. When I last saw him, he was quiet and at peace, as he lay there in the Hospice bed, in a quiet, beautiful surrounding with his wife and Drs. Courtney and Ora Jones in attendance. I sang a song for him — “Peace Be Still”. I hope that he heard it, and I pray that he has the peace that we all will someday earn.

Yes, Dr. Daniels earned his peace.

Dr. Denice Logan is the immediate past President of the West Michigan Medical Society and currently the Vice President the Wolverine State Medical Society.
Two Local Doctors Served In The Same Tradition As The Medical Center Named In Honor Of Them

His commitment to the community and its health needs established him as a pioneer of the present day well-baby clinics.

He operated a weekly well-baby clinic at the First Community A.M.E. Church.

Each year his service is brought to memory at the Annual Giants Banquet when an honoree receives the Eugene Browning Medical Service Giant Award.

He was the youngest of 13 children born to a farming couple in western Virginia who worked his way through college and medical school.

Claytor's parents were slaves as youth living in the pre-Civil War South. At the time of his death, he was the only surviving direct descendant of that family and had a family of his own to include his wife, Helen Claytor, and daughters Judith and Sharon and his stepson, Roger Wilkins.

Unable to attend the nearby white high school, after the eighth grade, Robert Claytor went to Virginia Normal Institute for Blacks and studied business. He then attended the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania.

“When he learned that opportunities for Black in business were more limited than what he had expected, he transferred and received a bachelor's degree in science at Northwestern University,” said his daughter Judith.

“When he applied for medical school at Northwestern, he was told he could not touch any patient and could only watch Blacks give birth. He then attended Meharry Medical College in Nashville, TN and graduated in 1934.”

Soon after completing his internship at Chicago’s Provident Hospital, Dr. Robert Claytor came to Grand Rapids in 1936 and set up practice at the corner of Michigan Street and Monroe Avenue.

“My father was the first Black doctor granted staff privileges to practice at a local hospital,” Judith said. “St. Mary’s was the first to extend the opportunity to him after he was here a few months, it was ten years later that Butterworth Hospital allowed him to practice.”

Among Dr. Claytor’s many honors, he was named “Physician of the Year” for Michigan. He also received the first Eugene Browning Medical Services Giant Award.

While Dr. Browning was known for pioneering well-baby clinics in this city, Dr. Claytor was known as “the baby doctor” because he delivered so many babies.

Dr. Claytor closed his office at the age of 80, and continued to work for a while in ER.

The building that housed his office when he retired still stands at the corner of Oakdale Street and Madison Avenue on the city’s southeast side, a few blocks south of the health center.

Today, the Browning Claytor’s Health Center, located at 1246 Madison Ave SE, shares the same philosophy as Mercy Health in its commitment to provide health care for all persons, regardless of their ability to pay.

“We believe that no one should go without needed health care because they cannot afford it. We are committed to providing the highest standard of health care with hospitality, respect, and compassion,” said Dr. Kennedy.

“The patients that do come here love it here,” she added. “We deal with a lot of issues that you would see in any community and a lot of issues that you would see in underserved communities, specifically. It’s nice that they get to see someone like me because a lot of African Americans do come here.”

What makes her work experience at Browning - Claytor rewarding?

“Honestly, how easy it is to get things done,” she said. “I am not used to working with an organization that is open to what it is that you have to say and working towards what it is that you need so quickly, or even at all. The administration really does listen to what it is that we need here.”

What should people of the community who do not have insurance know about the Browning - Claytor Health Center?

“Number one, we will see you; number two, we do have staff here who will help you to navigate yourself to insurance through the Affordable Care Act or otherwise,” said Dr. Kennedy. “Number three, you are going to get the same care here as you would anywhere else within our abilities.”

“She added, “Don’t come here thinking you are going to receive sub-standard care because we accept people with no insurance or are located in an underserved area. I want to be here, and I will be giving the same level of service as any other medical facility.”