

Dr. M. Joycelyn Elders served as the 15th surgeon general of the United States. She was the first person in the state of Arkansas to become board certified in pediatric endocrinology, the first African American and only the second woman to head the U.S. Public Health Service. Long an outspoken advocate of public health, Elders was appointed Surgeon General by President Clinton in 1993. A vice admiral in the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, she was the second woman, second person of color, and first African American to serve as Surgeon General.

Dr. Joycelyn Elders was born on August 14, 1933 in Schaal, Arkansas to Curtis Jones and Haller Reed Jones. Elders attended Howard County Training School in Tollette, Arkansas in 1942. She earned a four-year scholarship to attend Philander Smith College in Little Rock, Arkansas where she received her B.S. degree in biology in 1952. In 1960, Elders earned her M.D. degree and her M.S. degree in biochemistry in 1967 from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 1978, Elders earned her certification as a pediatric endocrinologist.

After she earned her M.D. degree, Dr. Elders began a pediatric internship at the University of Minnesota in St. Paul, Minnesota. She became the chief resident at the University of Arkansas Medical School in 1963. Elders was hired as an assistant professor at the University of Arkansas in 1971 and was promoted to the position of professor in 1976. In 1987, Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton appointed Elders as director of the Arkansas Department of Health. She then became the 15th Surgeon General of the United States under President Clinton in 1993. As Surgeon General, Elders focused on women's reproductive health care and promoted sex, alcohol, drug, and tobacco education in public schools. She resigned from that position in 1994 and returned to the University of Arkansas, where she worked as a professor of pediatric endocrinology. In 2002, Elders retired from the University of Arkansas Medical Center. In 2016, the Jocelyn Elders Clinic was established in Kisinga, Uganda. The clinic served students at Garama Humanist Secondary School, and promoted sex education and treated students that suffered from diseases such as malaria.

Now retired from practice, she is a professor emeritus at the University of Arkansas School of Medicine, and remains active in public health education.