

CELEBRATE PURDUE WOMEN

SULMA MOHAMMED



HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?

Success is accomplishing my goals and giving back to humanity worldwide. My mother sold her wedding ring to buy me clothes so I would not miss college. After that, I received support from the university and international scholarships that were thoughtfully made available to support girls in getting an education to help them emerge from poverty and nothingness and become professionals and scientists. As a scientist focusing on studying women's cancers, especially those with unprivileged status, I am hoping to succeed with scientific discoveries that would reduce cancer health disparity globally.

HOW HAS YOUR DEFINITION OF SUCCESS EVOLVED?

My definition of success evolved from knowing how to read and write to contributing to new knowledge. My two parents were illiterate. Further, success to me evolved to mean entering high school and the university and competing for international scholarships to earn higher degrees that would allow me to contribute to teaching, research, and engagement. My success evolved from attaining education to help myself and my family emerge from poverty to being a role model who sees education, research, and engagement as a medium for giving back to the people.

WHAT ROLE HAS COMMUNITY PLAYED IN YOUR SUCCESS?

Community is the incubator in which my abilities grew and blossomed. Starting with my community when I was a child, including schools and university teachers who relentlessly encouraged me and many other girls not to give up. A community of countless colleagues supported each other and refused to let the ship taking us to a better tomorrow sink. As a Sudanese immigrant, I identify with many communities in the USA, Africa, and many countries worldwide. This has been a crucial support for my progress and for giving back. In brief, community (COM., M., and Unity) represents COM - for coming, M for moving forward, and UNITY for uniting with other human beings. Therefore, community embodies the meaning of coming and moving forward in unity with other human beings, celebrating and embracing diversity. My colleagues in the Veterinary College and at Purdue University confirmed this meaning, as they continued to support my endeavors and celebrate my success every step while allowing me to do the same for others.

WHAT DOES MENTORSHIP MEAN TO YOU?

Mentorship is not just about getting the work done; it is an opportunity for collaboration, career development, growth of the mentee, and continuing learning of the mentor. I succeeded as a mentor when I saw evidence in my mentee's confidence and success in getting the job done while acquiring technical and soft skills and the ability to make decisions and take the responsibility seriously. In addition, I succeeded in mentoring when my mentees could contribute to problem-solving and teamwork while being mindful of their growth. Mentoring allows me to bridge the generational gap and interact with mentees from different geographical areas and cultures. Mentoring is an opportunity to grow as a leader, expand my network of collaborators, and benefit from the cross-fertilization of ideas.

WHAT ROLE HAS CONNECTION WITH OTHER PLAYED IN YOUR ACADEMIC JOURNEY?

I am thankful for the many opportunities that helped me get to know many distinguished women and men, scientists, organizations, university leaders, and fine human beings. Connection with these fine people opened my eyes to crucial interdisciplinary research work that helped generate funding to address the problem from different angles. It helped me expand my knowledge of institutions in the USA and abroad. It provided continuous cross-cultural brainstorming, which enabled me to ascertain my conviction that health problems like cancer require global collaborations and constant dialogue. Connections with diplomats, senior officials in ministries of health in Africa, and representatives in the USA helped expand my awareness of the Afro-centric cancer problem and led me to build a research focus on cancer in women living in low and middle-income countries.

Dr. Sulma Mohammed (DVM, MS, PhD) is a Professor of Cancer Biology in the Department of Veterinary Pathobiology at Purdue University and an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Immunology and Microbiology at Indiana University School of Medicine. She is a Purdue University 2022 Distinguished Alumni Scholar and Purdue University Scholar of Engagement. Dr. Mohammed has received numerous awards for her outstanding commitment and leadership in fighting cancer in Africa. She received the 2010 Leadership in the Field of Breast Cancer and Health Awareness Award from the University of Medical Sciences and Technology, Sudan, and the 2011 Leading the Way in Breast Cancer Research - You Made a Difference Award from the African Women's Cancer Awareness Association. She also received the 2016 African Diaspora Ambassador Award from Harvard Global Health Catalyst and the 2016 Pillar of Support Award for a Decade of Support and Personal Commitment to Stop Cancer in Africa by African First Ladies.

Dr. Mohammed's research focuses on women's breast and cervical cancers. She developed an Afro-centric immunocompetent animal model resource to examine immune-preventive and immunotherapeutic strategies in breast cancer in African and African American women. Also, she developed a culturally appropriate approach, using women volunteers to screen other women for breast abnormalities in rural areas in Africa where mammograms are not available. The work resulted in detecting early-stage breast cancer that was amenable to treatment. She also is developing a point-of-care test for cervical cancer screening in women in low- and middle-income countries. Her work has been supported for many years and continues to be supported by federal agencies and foundations, including the National Cancer Institute/NCI, the Department of Defense (DOD), the Showalter Trust Fund, and the Pharmaceutical Industry. Her innovative work in cancer research has been honored with the prestigious Walther Cancer Research Institute, the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR)-Cancer Research Foundation of America Fellowship in Prevention Research, NCI/NIH Fellowship, and Zoetis research awards.

Dr. Mohammed is a permanent member of the NIH study section, served on various committees of the American Association for Cancer Research and the African Organization for Research and Training in Cancer, and served as a member of the African Union Health Committee. She served as editor-in-chief, a member of high-impact journal editorial boards, and a grant reviewer for European, Middle Eastern, and African funding agencies and The Consortium of Universities for Global Health.