



## ABC6 Honors: Marine veteran who never gave up on dream to become a doctor



PROVIDENCE, R.I. - Dr. Eddie Copelin, who is now in his second year of residency at Roger Williams University, knew from a very young age that he wanted to be a doctor. It started as a keen interest in science, both in and out of the classroom.

"After-school programs on TV, like the Magic School Bus, and Bill Nye the Science Guy, and also, you know, growing up watching the Cosby Show," said Dr. Copelin.

In fact, he says Dr. Huxtable was the only role model that made him feel like becoming a doctor was an attainable goal.

"I could say, 'Alright he's an African American and he's a doctor.' So I used that as positive motivation to say that, you know, I can do this," said Dr. Copelin.

Dr. Copelin added that his father passed away from complications of diabetes, which further motivated him to get into the medical field.

But he first enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves, serving while still going to college.

In 2002, he was deployed to Iraq and had to take a year off from school. When he returned he faced his toughest challenge while pursuing medicine.

"Coming back from a wartime situation and sitting down in the classroom. I think that was the hardest thing overall, was getting focused and coming back to these first-world problems of Facebook and cell phones and stuff like that," said Copelin.

The perseverance he learned as a Marine pushed him through, and the leader he had become shaped him as a doctor.

"The physician being a leadership position, educating patients, being a leader not only for you patients but also for your fellow colleagues, these are all traits that are found in the Marine Corps," said Copelin.

He went to medical school at the American University of Antigua.

"There was a large African American population there, roughly 20%, and I really found that out when I went there. It was nice to be around like-minded people with like-minded goals and also to find out that there were second and third generation aspiring physicians," said Dr. Copelin.

That is a big improvement from the estimated 4% of black students enrolled in most medical schools. In fact, NPR found that fewer black men enrolled in med school in 2014 than in 1978.

Now Copelin hopes to serve as an inspiration to others who aspire to be a doctor but may feel that goal is out of reach.

"It doesn't matter who you are, just saying 'You can do this, anything is possible.' It's all about setting your priorities and envisioning yourself where you want to be and working step-by-step, day-by-day on each goal to get you where you want to go," said Dr. Copelin.