

**2026 Candle in Science, Engineering, and Technology Award Recipient**  
**Robert L. Satcher, M.D., Ph.D.**

*Orthopedic Surgeon and Oncologist; Chemical Engineer; and former NASA Astronaut*

Robert L. Satcher Jr., M.D, Ph.D., is an orthopedic oncologist, chemical engineer, and former NASA astronaut whose career stands at the intersection of science, surgery, and service. An accomplished clinician and researcher, he has devoted his life's work to improving outcomes for patients with complex bone and soft tissue cancers while advancing innovative approaches to care in academic medicine.

Satcher earned his undergraduate degree in chemical engineering before completing both a doctorate in chemical engineering and a medical degree, preparing for a vocation that unites rigorous scientific inquiry with hands-on healing. He went on to specialize in orthopedic surgery and musculoskeletal oncology, building a reputation for technical excellence, compassionate bedside care, and a deep commitment to those facing some of medicine's most challenging diagnoses.

In 2004, NASA selected Satcher to join its astronaut corps. This invitation answered one of Satcher's childhood dreams, allowing him to step into a pioneering role in American spaceflight. He flew as a mission specialist on STS-129 aboard the Space Shuttle Atlantis, becoming the first orthopedic surgeon to travel to space. Over the course of that mission, Satcher conducted experiments related to human physiology in microgravity and completed spacewalks to help install equipment and support operations on the International Space Station. His work in orbit contributed to a growing body of knowledge on how spaceflight affects the human body and how that knowledge might one day improve care on Earth.

After completing his NASA service, Satcher returned to academic medicine, where he continues to blend clinical practice, research, and education. His work has included leadership in global health collaborations, efforts to expand access to advanced cancer care, and early exploration of telemedicine and virtual care as tools to reach patients far beyond the walls of major medical centers. He remains a sought after lecturer and mentor, encouraging the next generation of physicians, engineers, and explorers to bring both curiosity and conscience to their work.

For the Morehouse community, Dr. Satcher's journey—from the laboratory to low Earth orbit and back to the clinic—offers a powerful example of what it means to use one's gifts in service to humanity. His life demonstrates that excellence in science and medicine need not be detached from empathy, and that discovery is at its best when it expands both human knowledge and human possibility.

In honoring Dr. Robert L. Satcher Jr. at the "A Candle in the Dark" Gala, Morehouse College salutes a surgeon, scientist, and astronaut whose light has reached the stars

and still returns, again and again, to illuminate the lives of patients, students, and communities here at home.