

# Healing for the Mind, Body & Soul

News Notes from California Black Women's Health Project

Volume 2, Issue 3

## CABWHP hosts Los Angeles Town Hall "Is Our Sweetness Our Weakness?"

By D. Adams, J. Amani, A. Bausley, H. Muqtasid, V. Shaw, C. Snuggs, J. Dudley, ATP

On September 24, 2003 in the auditorium of the Inglewood Public Library, CABWHP posed the question, *Is Our Sweetness Our Weakness?* Two outstanding advocates for women's health, Julie Fuller, MD and Patrice Harris, MD were on hand to help the audience of mostly African-American women answer this thought-provoking question.

At the town hall meeting, the relationship between Black women's mental, emotional and physical health, with a special emphasis on diabetes and cardiovascular disease, was explored. Another point of discussion was how Black women feel as though we must carry the burden of our race on our backs alone.

Dr. Julie Fuller discussed her views on this subject and how "depression can literally break your heart". Dr. Fuller stated that whether we admit it or not, our sweetness is our weakness, but it is also leading to our demise. Dr. Fuller supported this statement with some alarming facts. For example, 40% of Black women in the U.S. die from some form of heart disease. In addition, 67 of every 100 Black women are overweight, and of those, 38 are obese. Studies show 60% of Black women suffer from some form of depression or mental illness and only 7% are getting treatment for these illnesses. Since the body functions in conjunction with the mind, this

statistic is most alarming. Without a healthy mind, it is much harder for one to have a healthy body. Dr. Fuller recommended actions we can take to help ourselves, which include: teaching women how to modify our damaging behaviors and incorporate healthy ones; training health professionals how to recognize mental illness among people of color; and incorporating a holistic approach to wellness.

Dr. Patrice Harris addressed the stigma of mental illness in the Black community. She emphasized the need to define mental illness as a brain disorder, underscoring the importance of not separating the mind from the body. Mental health often gets put on the "backburner" in the health arena, when it should definitely be in the forefront. For example, Medicare and other insurance plans require hefty co-pays when it comes to mental healthcare, with Medicare requiring a 50% co-pay. Dr. Harris pointed out the obvious discrimination in requiring this large co-pay. She made the point that trained advocates are greatly needed in the African-American community. This is the best way to get our issues to the top of policy-makers' agendas.

So what can the average

person do to improve the state of the health care system? We must learn the process of advocacy in order to learn how to be effective. Dr. Harris encouraged us to be aware of the policies on the state level and national level, but first one must be an advocate for one's own health. We must modify our behavior to improve the current state of our health, recognize when something is wrong and get health screenings.

William Schlitz, a representative from Senator Edward Vincent's office, gave a brief talk on pressing issues that will affect the quality of health care right here in Los Angeles County, such as Proposition 54. He also remarked on the possible loss of Charles Drew School of Medicine and loss of services at King/Drew Medical Center.

**Is our Sweetness our Weakness?** The evidence says "yes". We must find healthier ways to be sweet to ourselves so that we can better care for ourselves and others.

For more information or to get involved with the CABWHP Town Hall Series contact Erica Robbins at 310 412-1828 ext 11 or [erica@cabwhp.org](mailto:erica@cabwhp.org).



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Continued from cover story...

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SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health & Sexual Rights National Conference

November 13-16, 2003 Spelman College Atlanta, Georgia

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Helpin! Fight C

Combating obesity (a growing problem for African Americans) helps to fight heart disease and stroke. That is the word from the American Heart Association (AHA), which offers free programs to help fight obesity and other heart disease and stroke risk factors.

Obesity is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease—America’s no 1 killer. It occurs when, over time, more calories are taken in by eating than are used up through physical activity.

manage their weight and live healthier lives for themselves and their families.”

Some free America Heart Association programs that African Americans can participate in include:

Search your Heart -- A faith-based program that educates African American about prevention, including health screenings, workshops and activities.

The Cholesterol Low Down -- A program that offers cholesterol information and year round support to help participants reach their health goals.

The Heart of Diabetes: Understanding Insulin Resistance -- A program to help type 2 diabetes patients reduce their risk for heart disease through physical activity, weight control, nutrition and cholesterol management.

Simple Solutions -- A program that helps women incorporate simple healthy changes into their lives.

For more information on how to reduce your risk for heart disease and stroke and to participate in these free programs call the American Heart Association at 1-800-AHA-USA1 or visit www.americanheart.org.

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Checklist section with various symptoms listed and a concluding paragraph: 'Checking a particular symptom doesn't mean you have depression, but because many depression symptoms overlap with other illness, this information can be useful to your physician.' Includes contact info for 310 412-1828 and citation for 'Saving Our Last Nerve: The Black Woman's Path to Mental Health'.

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*Continued from cover story...*  
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"Committed to improving the health of  
Black women and girls in California"

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**News Notes from California Black Women's  
Health Project**

#### **DID YOU KNOW THAT?....**

- The California Department of Mental Health (along with other departments and a pending task force) required by law (SB 1448) to track patients who have died at state hospitals and developmental centers.
- A recent study found that women who weighed 155 pounds or more had a 60 percent higher risk of oral contra-

## Save the Date!

Town Hall Meeting

*"Is Your Job Making You Sick?"*

Black Women, Racism and Stress

Date: November 6, 2003

Time: 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm

Location: TBA

For more information contact Erica Robbins at:  
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