

STATE OF BLACK ARIZONA
HEALTH SECTION DRAFT

Better Than Surviving...Celebrating Life!
The Untold Stories of Hero's

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The information contained in this essay is provided as a means to motivate conversation and action and is not represented to be error free. The views expressed herein are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the views of the State of Black Arizona or any of its partners and collaborators.

Abstract-

The purpose of this section is to highlight diseases and conditions that disproportionately affect the African-American community throughout Arizona. Through the use of narrative vignettes, this section tells the personal stories of nine individuals' trials, tribulations, and triumphs over chronic diseases.

Lastly, this section provides information on programs and agencies that currently provide information, and or assistance to community, as they relate to the disease and conditions listed, providing readers with a wealth of resourceful information .

The Center for African American Health Arizona, (CAAHAz pronounced "cause") created by a committee of community volunteers is committed to improving the health and well-being of the African American community. The chart below illustrates the seriousness of that commitment.

The purpose of our paper is three fold.

- 1. Bring to your attention the devastating statistics for health/mortality as it relates to chronic disease, amongst African Americans in Arizona. These statistics will be woven throughout the fabric of the document, so as not to daunt you with data, yet awaken your senses to the enormity of the problem.**
- 2. Introduce you to community citizens that have met these diseases head on by challenging them, and then winning that battle. These citizens are our Heros!**
- 3. Provide you with proven information and resources on where to go and what to do. Should you, a friend, or a loved one be faced with having to win the battle of chronic disease.**

Throughout history, Africans and African Americans have been a people of stories. These stories have been told by the Shaman of days past in the village, the self-appointed historian/elder in the family circle, or the neighborhood orator to whom we always seem to listen. The CAAHAz ability to arouse curiosity is heightened when that curiosity is met with a message that is insightful, educational, as well as entertaining. Storytelling is an art to be valued and shared. It is the vehicle many of us have used to learn and teach our most revered lessons. The CAAHAz hopes that these stories will entertain you but more importantly educate you.

Many of these stories center around disease, and how brave and courageous individuals have battled their diseases and won! What makes one successful in the battle of disease? Herschel Phillips (prostate cancer hero) might tell you that it's knowing that "life is the only option" in which you dig in your heels and fight. Quite similar is Rosalind Buckhanan (breast cancer hero), who insisted she would "live and not die." On the other hand, it could be about the help of supporting agencies like the Area Agency on Aging. Robin Culan (Area Agency on Aging Director of Legal Aide), eloquently states "we are a fantastic agency that allows people to live independently as they age." Our stories are many and our desire to share is more.

Ultimately, we hope these brief vignettes will inspire you to take additional measures to ensure your own good health while being fully aware of your options, should a battle ensue for you..

Infant Mortality

It Takes a Village to Birth a Child...

When a baby is born, she doesn't have to die. This seems obvious, but the African American community is in crisis when it comes to the survival of our babies. Both national and state statistics tell us African Americans have the highest rates of infant mortality. In the state of Arizona, 15.2% of black babies born in 2007 did not make it to see their first birthday. Whether it be lack of physical support, access to early and consistent prenatal care, lack of proper nutrition, or prematurity and low birth weight causes of infant mortality are complicated and numerous yet, there are agreed upon and proven ways to improve birth outcomes in at risk groups. With the adequate supports, healthy thriving babies can be born.

Lakeisha Crump, Phoenix Arizona

Lakeisha Crump knows very well the power care, compassion, education and support can have on a pregnant mother and her baby. This 25 year old single mother of two (Miracle, 5 and Malaysia, 1) constantly reiterates the role South Phoenix Healthy Start has played in the life of her and her children. During Lakeisha's second pregnancy she was referred to Healthy Start, where she found the type of support and guidance she likened to family. Being a Detroit Native, Lakeisha's only biological family in Arizona is her mother and daughter but Lakeisha found a communal family in South Phoenix Healthy Start.

Whether it was housing concerns, information and education on health pregnancy and delivery or post partum care, Healthy Start was there to aid and empower Lakeisha and her children. The agency helped Lakeisha through high risk pregnancy (due to asthma, ovarian cysts, and anemia) coupled with domestic issues. With the continued assistance of Healthy Start, Lakeisha not only had a healthy full term pregnancy and subsequently delivering a beautiful healthy 8 lb 11 oz baby girl, she was also able to move out of a chaotic and unhealthy living environment and into a sound and stable home with her girls. Even though she experienced postpartum depression, Lakeisha was able to recognize precursors and triggers to depressive episodes with the help and down to earth education she received from Healthy Start.

Lakeisha is making wonderful returns on the investments made in her life by South Phoenix Healthy Start. Even while Lakeisha was pregnant with her second daughter, she took advantage of the opportunity to volunteer at South Phoenix Healthy Start. She also takes her most important role and responsibility as a mother very seriously. Ensuring her daughters have the good nutrition and timely medical care are of the utmost importance to Lakeisha. Both Miracle and Malaysia are as asthmatic and their mother stays on top of their necessary treatments. Lakeisha also works as an asthma educator in her community in conjunction with her full time position as an assistant branch manager for pay day loan office.

Lessons Learned:

When it comes to articulating her thoughts on ways African Americans can live healthier lives for themselves and their children, Lakeisha has some very keen insights. She believes many women of color lack the supports and networks needed to have healthy pregnancies and postpartum periods. She feels the medical community can do more in the way of providing education that is not merely in the realm of academia and texts books. Lakeisha has observed a desire in herself and her peers to receive information in a way that is practical and experiential. She says it is easier to accept support and information from those who have "been there". Lakeisha lives an example of ways the black community can take control of their own health. During her pregnancies, Lakeisha not only made strides to connect to Healthy Start and create her own extended family, she also insisted on having a physician she felt comfortable with and who she truly believed values her and her family. Lakeisha willingly shares the information she has gained about health and wellness with her friends, family, co-workers, and associates. She advises giving up

an excess of fast and fried foods as well as cutting out smoking. She continues to maintain and nurture the relationship she has with South Phoenix Healthy Start. Lakeisha is motivated to live a productive and thriving life to ensure her daughters have a better future while taking things “one day at a time.”

Lisa Derrick: South Phoenix Healthy Start

“The great thing about South Phoenix Healthy Start is, we haven’t lost any babies in our program!” This was the grateful and humble reply of Lisa Derrick, Director of South Phoenix Healthy Start, when asked if there were any program participants who lost an infant that could be interviewed. This life giving program has found success in the South Phoenix community through, community health education, linking families with community resources, monthly meetings informing mothers about maternal child health issues, in home visits and support for pregnant and parenting women, as well as providing depression screenings. Along with these resources, the agency is looking into future and expanding on the world health model it is based on. The program is examining research from the world of academia to better understand and positively impact the stressors impacting child maternal health and birth outcomes. For more information, please contact Lisa Derrick at (602) 364-3610.

Domestic Violence

“Don’t Ask, Don’t tell”

In Arizona, every five minutes police respond to a call involving domestic violence and every 36 minutes police respond to a call involving domestic violence where children are present. 12.2 % of African-American women and their families in Arizona sought shelter services as a result of domestic violence in fiscal year 2008. These numbers do not include those who did not seek shelter, call the police, or file a report.

Joyce White, Phoenix Arizona

Joyce White a beautiful and regal embodiment of steel and strength is a survivor!

Joyce was also raised during a time when the policy was “Don’t ask, Don’t tell!”

This policy however, did not apply to the military, but to everyday life. *Don’t ask where those bruises came from, don’t tell anybody how you got them.*

After being raped by her cousin at age 13, Joyce was thrown out of the house by her father for becoming pregnant. At age 14 she married her future abuser. She was a child, alone and pregnant and felt she had no recourse but to marry this man more than 40 years older than her, age 56.

This is when the true hell began. He used to beat her often, without cause and often on a whim. He was also very possessive and jealous. She was never allowed to see anyone except his mother and occasionally his aunt and niece. One particular night he beat her so bad, she was on her deathbed.

At the time Joyce’s mother had been beaten and other relatives as well, so to a certain extent, she thought beatings were a part of life, but she never anticipated the beatings would almost end her life. After being discovered by her husband’s niece, she had a long recovery in the hospital which ended with her moving to a battered women’s home, upon the recommendation of the police officer and social worker assigned to her case.

Her main goal was to get back on her feet, get a job and a place to live; so she could reclaim her 9 children whom she had lost custody of during her recovery. Now, Joyce a successful jewelry designer is living a stable life and is aware of the impact domestic violence has on African- American woman. This knowledge has inspired her to be an advo-

cate and she currently teaches women who are survivors of domestic violence how to use art as therapy to build their self-esteem.

Lessons Learned

- I used to be ashamed of my past experience, but time has taught me to use my experience to help other women and that has become my goal. I believe now that I survived because I was meant to help women, other people, and their families.

This experience helped me to define myself as an advocate against domestic violence. I decided to stop wallowing in self pity. I changed my perspective from being a victim of domestic violence to a survivor of domestic violence 10 years ago. I think part of this defining moment occurred after having therapy and realizing I could be a victim in my own mind for as long as I chose to and I choose not to be anymore. I think speaking out about it helped the most in redefining myself as a survivor.

- I believe prayer is the strongest, most powerful weapon you can have.
- Please tell somebody what you are enduring, even if it is a stranger.
- Don't be embarrassed!
- Recognize the symptoms of abuse
- Don't believe that just because someone else (family member) went through it, so should you.

I think the biggest way we can take charge of our health is to start talking about our problems, telling other people. I know it is not really a part of our culture, but I think keeping feelings and issues inside not only affects us emotionally but also physically. We should not have to wait until we have a breakdown! Talk to someone! We as a people seem to have the "I solve problems, I don't have problems." mentality.

La Tonia Turner: Arizona Coalition to Prevent Domestic Violence (AZCADV)

La Tonia Turner is the administrative coordinator of (AZCADV) in Phoenix. They are a resource and referral organization. They also have a hotline for anyone to call in, especially victims of domestic violence. Education plays a huge role in the work that they do. They offer basic trainings, e.g. domestic violence 101 (4-8hr courses), the sharing experience (1 week course), which is domestic violence 101 plus, for people who work in the field; counselors, law enforcement, and first responders. They also do regional trainings and refreshers courses. They educate and train a wide array of people, including different agencies, schools, workplaces, apartment complexes, and boys and girls clubs. They work in conjunction with organizations such as DES and John F. Long to provide domestic violence initiatives. In addition, they have a system's department which is used to address public policy through various methods including, educating legislators on the effect that bills have on victims of domestic violence and or sexual assault. Lastly they utilize a speaker's bureau which is very important for putting a face to the numbers with regards to victims of domestic violence. The Women of Color Committee within AZCADV is also active in trying to provide a

forum that honors, values, and validates those whose lives have been impacted by domestic violence, while celebrating diversity and the various cultures within Arizona. For more information on the services available please contact La Tonia Turner at ac@azcadv.org or (602) 279-2900.

Breast Cancer

“I shall live and not die!”

In 2007, African-American women in Arizona died from breast cancer at a rate of 23.9/ 100,000. This is the highest rate for all racial groups in Arizona.

Rosalind Buckhanan, Sierra Vista, Arizona

Herstory

Rosalind Buckhanan, a slender, soft-spoken, and attractive woman is grace personified. Beating deep within her is the heart of a lion that has battled breast cancer twice and won. Although she has no family history of breast cancer, there is a long family history of cancer on both sides of her family.

Rosalind was diagnosed in 1998 after she discovered a lump in her left breast during a breast self exam. She had no other symptoms. In 2008, she also discovered a lump in the same breast during a self exam.

Unlike during her 1st battle with cancer when she received chemotherapy and radiation, during her second battle with cancer, Rosalind opted for a bilateral mastectomy. In addition, she had her ovaries removed. During both bouts of cancer Rosalind was motivated to complete the medical process from the excellent familial support she received both times from her husband, children and parents and through her faith the second time. She also felt motivated and empowered by the knowledge she had gained after her 1st experience with cancer.

Having faced cancer twice, Rosalind felt the second time around she had the opportunity to do it her way. During her first experience she felt her doctor was very robotic in his interactions with her and didn't really explain what she would experience very well. So Rosalind took it upon herself to do some research and get recommendations and found a brilliant physician who not only explained the process, but offered her his support and guidance throughout her recovery, as well as now.

When she was diagnosed with breast cancer, she knew very little initially but by the second time she was very informed about breast cancer, potential outcomes, and how the African-American community is impacted by the disease.

Lessons Learned

Her experiences with breast cancer have affected Rosalind profoundly. She feels that when one is confronted with one's own mortality, one recognizes the need to appreciate life, each day to recognize the big picture, and realize small things don't matter. But also that cancer does not have to be a death sentence.

Rosalind feels it is important to take care of yourself, especially black women because we are sooo often taught to be caregivers to everyone else but ourselves. There are also small lessons to be learned, watch your diet, exercise, sleep well, and in general be proactive when it comes to your health and well being.

She has been defined by this experience in a very positive way. She sees herself as a survivor, someone who has endured and has learned how to become a pillar of strength.

Rosalind advises those dealing with cancer to not to be afraid to challenge health care professionals, ask questions, and change doctors if you need to. You have the right to get the best care possible for you. Patients should also find information about their disease and look for people who help you find information that will empower you. Lastly, never lose hope, it is the one thing that can pull you through and remember this passage, "This sickness is not unto death, I shall live and not die!"

Debra Barnes: Wellness to Go

Debra Barnes, a women's healthcare nurse practitioner is the director of Wellness to Go, a medical office in west phoenix whose focus is prevention, screening, and education. Wellness to Go offers free clinical breast exams, as well as the option of a pap smear at an additional nominal cost. They also offer referrals for a free mammogram or a nominal cost mammogram to those that need it.

Wellness to Go has also established a group called the *Arizona Minority Connection* which is a monthly support group for breast cancer survivors and their families. Every 4th Tuesday of the month, at 7pm, they offer an open support group and focus on a topic related to breast cancer as well. They are also available to provide mobile screenings for breast health, cholesterol, diabetes, blood pressure, height and weight. For more information about Wellness to Go or the services available, please contact Debra Barnes, at info@wellnesstogo.org or (623) 873-7503.

Cardiovascular Health

"I feel so blessed"

It is not surprising or recent news the number one killer of African Americans nationally is Cardiovascular or Heart Disease. According to the 2007 ADHS report , heart disease is still the number cause of death among black people.* What is alarming are the continued misconceptions about who in the black community cardiovascular disease is affecting. Contrary to popular belief cardiovascular disease does not only affect older people or those who are perceived to be in poor physical condition. Individuals of all ages are affected by cardiovascular disease. When introduced to this vibrant, physically active, 36 year old, wife, and mother of three, it is difficult to conceive she has any physical challenges. With a vivacious and friendly personality that fills the room, Ms. Johnson-Gray readily recounts her unexpected and life altering journey with cardiovascular disease.

Tawanda Johnson-Gray

Her Story:

In 2005, one year after relocating to Arizona, Tawanda (a Chicago native), began experiencing what can only be described as excruciating and debilitating physical pain. Following an episode of, severe headache, left side, paralysis, numbness, slurred speech, and mild memory loss, Tawanda sought treatment at a local E.R. Although

diagnosed with migraines, Ms. Gray immediately believed she was having a stroke and a heart attack. Throughout the next two years Tawanda suffered three more episodes of diagnosed “migraines”, when her most recent occurrence on August 9, 2008 sent her to Banner Desert. While admitted, she persistently pleaded with physicians to conduct more tests and “search further” because she was certain what she had been experiencing was much more than severe headaches. Following negative finding for Multiple Sclerosis, an Echocardiogram was performed in conjunction with “Bubble Study” leading to the discovery of a whole in Tawanda’s heart. Following continued tests, Tawanda was diagnosed as Protein S Deficient (which causes her blood to clot excessively internally) and Patent Foramen Ovale (PFO) (a whole in the heart). The whole in her heart allows blood clots to travel to her brain and causing the TIA/strokes she believed she was having all along.

With the knowledge gained from an accurate diagnosis and the support of her best friend, Tawanda has gained direction, support, and empowerment on her journey as a stroke survivor. From Chicago, Tawanda’s best friend contacted the American Heart Association in Phoenix in an attempt to link Tawanda with assistance and information regarding stroke and heart disease. From thousands of miles away, the love and support of a friend, more like a sister put into motion the connections which would be vital for Tawanda’s action plan for health. Through her best friend, Tawanda was introduced to AHA Director of Cultural Health Initiatives, Nichole Ayoola, who would subsequently bring Tawanda together with Cardiologist and community activist Dr. Paul Underwood and Hematologist Dr. Michael Long.

When asked what motivates her to continue with her medical plan, Tawanda resolutely responds it is her family which causes her to keep up with her medical treatment and constantly educate herself and others on health concerns. Tawanda emphatically expressed her desire to be present and healthy for her children. She also explained how she believes it is imperative to provide her children with as much information as possible about their own family medical background. Tawanda’s drive and determination to educate and empower does not end with her immediate family. Through the AHA Tawanda is a Power to End Stroke Ambassador. By way of her own experience with cardiovascular disease and stroke Tawanda has become aware the extent which cardiovascular disease affects the African American community and she has resolved to make a difference with the knowledge she has. Tawanda wants to not only educate community members she also believes the medical community can take steps to be more receptive to the needs and concerns of the African American community.

Tawanda realizes her identity as a stroke survivor has changed her life in incomprehensible ways. She said, “I feel so blessed and I thank God everyday for making me courageous enough to stand up for myself, but most importantly to position me to stand up for those who do not have a voice...”

Lessons Learned

Tawanda emphasizes how imperative it is for one to possess and understand his or her own medical records. Individuals can not merely depend on medical professionals to be responsible for their health. We must advocate for ourselves and the ones we love.

Nicole Ayoola- Director of Cultural Health Initiatives: American Heart Association

As Director of Cultural Health Initiatives, Nichole Ayoola, is committed to providing programs, services, and education to Arizona’s African American community. One of the vital programs utilized by the AHA to connect to

the black community is the Power to End Stroke Campaign. This dynamic plan of action provides a multilevel approach by teaching people the five warning signs of a stroke, encouraging health behavior changes including healthy diets and exercise. The program is made more effective through its community collaborations and outreach. The campaign partners with individual Ambassadors take a pledge to get the message out, as well as with churches. AHA AZ also facilitates another community based informational and educational heart health program known as the Barber Shop Hypertension program. In conjunction with the Black Nurses Association the AHA educate barbers and stylists on the signs, symptoms, and preventions for hypertension. Stylists also receive training in providing in blood pressure checks. African Americans can come to a familiar and friendly location in their community and reap the benefits of style and health.

Educating the youth on the importance of their own cardiovascular health is another way the American Heart Association working to make positive and tangible improvements in overall heart health. Jump Rope for Heart is a fundraising opportunity for minority populations to get the word out. AHA's Halle Heart Museum is another resource targeted to the youth. This is a hands on interactive exhibit where young people can learn about heart health in a tangible manner. For more information, please contact Nichole Ayoola at (602) 414-5359.

Prostate Cancer

"Life was the only option"

Prostate cancer has become the most common type of cancer among men and is the most diagnosed cancer in the United States. It kills 1 man every 16 minutes. The disease will strike 4300 men in Arizona this year alone, one in six will develop prostate cancer and 700 will not survive.

Herschel Phillips- Tucson, Arizona

History

Herschel Phillips is a smooth, debonair brother, whose aura is reminiscent of Langston Hughes and the era of the renaissance black man. Who would believe that the fit and flirty Mr. Phillips is actually 88, going on 40?

To his knowledge, Mr. Phillips has no family history of cancer at all. In 1994, He went for a general check-up at the VA (Veteran's Administration) Hospital. His doctor asked him if he had had a PSA (prostate specific antigen) test before. He said no, so he sent him for the test. The test came back positive and he was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

His doctor proceeded to explain all the options available to him. They could take the wait and see approach with the cancer or Mr. Phillips could have a radical prostatectomy (prostate surgery). If he had the prostatectomy, it would impair his ability to have sexual relations.

Mr. Phillips was 75 years of age at the time and for him *life was the only option*. According to Mr. Phillips, sex was not a major issue. If he were younger perhaps it would have been.

The doctor had taken his time and explained all the pro's and con's of his situation, so he felt confident about his decision. He had the surgery and felt he was treated exceedingly well by the VA. At the time he was diagnosed and

for awhile after he had the surgery, he had no idea of the impact that prostate cancer has had on African-American men. He has since become aware, especially after meeting and working with Fred Taylor, the executive director of the Southwest Prostate Cancer Foundation

Lessons Learned

(In his own words) Prostate cancer hasn't changed my life. I still do the same things I always did. However, I have learned more about the disease and I do take every opportunity I have to talk to males about keeping up with their PSA tests annually. I also work with the board of the Southern Arizona Prostate Cancer Foundation.

To the African-American community I would say be adamant about your health, do what the doctor tells you to do to give you a better chance to prolong your life. I lost 2 friends to prostate cancer just because they wouldn't follow through on treatment. I have also become aware of the impact prostate cancer can have not just on the man, but on his family as well. In the black community health has to be a family affair. Black men need someone in the family to prod them about their health. They just don't seem to be into early prevention, so someone has to motivate them. "I LOVE ME, so that's my motivation."

Fred Taylor: Southwest Prostate Cancer Foundation

Fred Taylor is the Executive Director of the Southwest Prostate Cancer Foundation (SPCF). The goal of his organization is to increase education and awareness with regards to prostate cancer. The organization conducts prostate screenings, health screenings, health fairs and presentations in order to get the message out- "Men can survive prostate cancer if we can catch it early". Mr. Taylor focuses on early screening and the whole family with respect to education and awareness initiatives. He thinks it is especially important to utilize women to encourage the men in their lives to get tested. "African-American men are diagnosed at a 50% higher rate than their white counterparts, but they die at a 100% higher rate. This has got to stop."

For more information on prostate cancer and the work SPCF does, please contact, Fred Taylor at Box 12186, Glendale, AZ, 85318, (602) 547 3806, swprostatecancer@aol.com.

HIV/AIDS

"There is no room in heaven for you"

In Arizona there is a clear and alarming impact of HIV/AIDS in the African American community. African Americans in Arizona experience an epidemic of HIV/AIDS that is at least 3 times more severe than any other race/ethnic group. This disparity is more pronounced among African American women than among African American men. Among African American women, the rate of emergent HIV infection is rising. Although HIV has historically been a disease that predominantly affects males in Arizona, the current rate of emergent HIV among African American women is 50% higher than the mean rate among men.

MiAsia Pasha- Phoenix, Arizona

Her story-MiAsia Pasha is a vivacious woman, with an indomitable spirit who embodies the notion, "I am woman, hear me roar!" Upon meeting Ms. Pasha no one would ever surmise that this glorious vision of beauty and health was HIV positive, but she is.

MiAsia's first husband unbeknownst to her was living on the down low. He died in 1991 and his partner died in 1986, however her husband had apparently been sleeping with men since the age of 16! After her husband died, she took an HIV test and it came back positive, but she had no symptoms, so she lived in denial and persisted in a state of denial for 10 years. During those 10 years she was also quite healthy, this helped to aid her state of denial.

In 2001, she had complications from having a tooth pulled. She proceeded to lose weight and the antibiotics prescribed were not effective. The physician suggested she have another HIV test, and the test was again positive, but at this point she was told she had approximate 4 T cells.

MiAsia essentially gave up and went back to the Midwest to be with her family and die. By the time she returned home she had withered away to 120lbs due to experimenting with drugs and very poor eating habits. She also refused to take her HIV medication.

It was MiAsia's best friend who motivated her to fight for her life. She called her that Christmas and said "God told me there is no room in heaven for you" She also expressed that she felt MiAsia had a bad attitude. It was the overwhelming love and support of her best friend that pushed MiAsia to fight for her life, change her attitude, eat properly and start taking her medications. In fact, MiAsia credits her for saving her life.

Stigma played a big role in MiAsia's initial decision not to fight the disease. She only

wanted to die because she felt so overwhelmed by the thought of having to confront the stigma that comes with HIV/AIDS, as well as having to tell her family members.

Initially, she had a very bad interaction with the medical community. She had an adverse reaction to the medications, but the doctor told her to continue to take them even though they were making her sick. Then he told her to throw the remaining medications in the trash. She didn't have the strength to argue with the doctors, so her family researched and found her a doctor that was much more compassionate.

In 1991, she was not aware of the impact HIV/AIDS had on the African-American community. In 2001, she was still not aware, but she knew the disease was prevalent in Africa. Now she is fully aware of the impact and strives to be an advocate. In fact, one day MiAsia would like to become the face/spokesperson of HIV/AIDS in America.

Lessons Learned-HIV has made me aware of my purpose on this earth, to be an advocate for the disease. It has made aware of the need for advocates within our community. I think people need a role model who is both positive and a survivor that they can look to and say she is doing well. To the African-American community I would say let go of the stigma and ignorance. HIV is not a death sentence, get tested and LIVE! Dare to be Aware! You only have one body, take care of it!

RJ Shannon:Arizona Department of Health Services Office of HIV/AIDS

The HIV Prevention Planning Group of Arizona (PPGA) works in concert with the CDC. PPGA plays an important role in determining which community agencies CDC funding should be disbursed to. ADHS also partners with local health departments and community organizations to provide HIV testing and other prevention programs. RJ Shannon, _____, works tirelessly with ADHS HIV Prevention Program and also with NASTAD, National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors. Ms. Shannon understands a multidimensional approach is needed to combat the HIV/AIDS crisis in the black community and her dedication and exemplary effort throughout the entire state of Arizona have garnered her the recipient of the Hegyi Award from the Southwest Center for HIV/AIDS.

Educational initiatives informing people about HIV/AIDS and other STI's are important. Yet, teaching people about safe sex, high risk behaviors, and disseminating condoms is only the beginning. Expanding the domain which is considered education in regards to HIV/AIDS is imperative for improving the outreach, prevention, and overall outcomes. NASTAD, offers in depth and culturally relevant means of confronting HIV/AIDS within the black community. For more information, please contact RJ Shannon at (602) 364 3610.

Mental Health

"I need help so I can help myself!"

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the number of refugees suffering from mental health disorders is estimated to be 50%. Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) occurs in many cases due to traumatic experiences such as torture, sexual violence, witnessing killings, and harsh detention.

Johari Noor-Mental Health/Refugee Health- Phoenix, Arizona

Her story-

To meet Johari Noor is to know immediately that you are indeed in the presence of true suffering. Her countenance faced downwards, she struggles to make eye contact as she relays her story of despair and heartbreak. As she tells her story she is brought to tears on many occasions. It is difficult to focus on the task at hand.

From Somalia, to the Refugee Camps in Kenya, East Africa, finally to Phoenix, AZ;

it has been a harrowing journey for Johari, but it has only just begun. Although she has reached a peaceful destination in Phoenix, her journey towards health and wellness is ongoing.

Johari suffers from PTSD, brought on either by experiences in Somalia or Kenya , and since arriving in Phoenix she has not been able to create a functional lifestyle for her and her two children.

Since May 2007, she is afraid to leave the house because on so many occasions she has been unable to find her way back home. She has also called the police because she thought that she was abused or her children were abused. She consistently feels like someone wants to hurt her or her children. She is also constantly hearing voices and suffering from debilitating headaches. She is on medication, and also suffers from stomach problems as well as leg problems. The biggest problem for Johari is that she lacks the social support necessary to help her try to function in society. This single mom, with mental health issues appears to be very close to the edge. When asked about her circumstances, she replies that she is lonely, helpless, and most definitely in need of social support. She worries most about her children, if she can not work, she can not help them and what will become of them. As it stands, Johari does not work and her children who are in school have many needs. Johari herself understands, that she needs help. In her own words, "I need help, so I can help myself!"

*Lessons Learned-*The Center for African-American Health is working together with the Somali Association of Arizona, Magellan, and the Refugee Women's Health Clinic to get Johari the help she needs. It is important to understand that refugees can suffer from mental health issues, especially those survivors of war and trauma. Therefore it is imperative they get the support and care needed in order to become functional members of the societies in which they live.

Unfortunately when it comes to African American's there is also a concern when it comes to mental health. Understanding the need to seek professional help is often times avoided due to the stigma that still accompanies the issue. The Center for African American Health in Denver Colorado initiated a brief survey to find out how African Americans could be enticed to seek mental health services. What they found was if the issue of mental health was posed as an issue of depression, African Americans were more likely to seek help, since depression is understandable, and accepted. This is a start, since most forms of mental health encompasses depression.

Hakim Osman:Somali Association of Arizona-

Hakim Osman is the director of the Somali Association of Arizona. This organization has programs that are focused towards 6 major areas; enhancing community outreach & advocacy, cultural sensitivity, personal development, youth, healthcare, and small business development. However, the major role the Somali Association plays in the Phoenix community is that of outreach and advocacy. They spend time educating the public at large about Somali culture and cultural differences, especially medical services providers. This outreach includes; health departments, police departments, clinics, employees, schools, colleges, and other communities. With regards to mental health, they make referrals for mental health issues and accompany many clients on referrals because of the huge distrust that currently exists between the Somali community and mental health professionals. For further information about the services available or to schedule and educational session, please contact Hakim Osman, at 602 486 1941.

Jeanne Nizigiyimana & Dr. Crista E. Johnson:Refugee Women's Health Clinic (RWHC)

Refugee Women's Health Clinic (RWHC) is only the second clinic of its kind in the continental United States. The purpose of the clinic is to provide culturally grounded and linguistically appropriate health services to the growing refugee and immigrant community in the Phoenix metropolitan area. The clinic will also focus on reducing/eliminating health disparities and cultural barrier to care. The clinic hopes to achieve its goals by focusing on education, especially on prenatal care, delivery and postpartum care, and maternal and child health issues. For more information on the clinic or its services, please contact Dr. Crista E. Johnson, Director or Jeanne Nizigiyimana, Program Manager at 602 344 1445 or Crista_Johnson@medprodoctors.com.

Diabetes

"Everything happens for a reason!"

Diabetes is a chronic condition that affects the African-American community adversely. The rate of death from diabetes in the African-American community in Arizona is 30.3 per 100,000.

Ashley Rae Hannah- Representing Flagstaff, Arizona

Herstory

It is hard to imagine upon meeting Ashley Rae Hannah that this beautiful, bubbly and vivacious young lady suffers from Type 1 Diabetes (Juvenile Diabetes).

Ashley, who has no family history of diabetes, was diagnosed at age 9 after experiencing fatigue and sleeping and urinating excessively. After being diagnosed she was hospitalized for a week, in order for her and her mother to take a crash course in diabetes care and treatment. She learned about the disease, diet, exercise, and how to administer insulin.

One can only imagine how difficult this process would be on an adult, but for a nine year old child living in Flagstaff Arizona, it was quite draining. Ashley was motivated to complete the medical process by fear. At the time, she thought if she didn't do what she was asked, she would die immediately. As she recollects this time Ashley is brought to tears. Tears for the child she was who could not understand why she had been given this burden and at such a young age and tears for the fear she felt then because she thought that death was imminent.

In terms of the care she has received, Ashley feels that the medical establishment takes juvenile diabetes very seriously. She has always felt extremely well cared for by all the doctors and nurses she has seen.

Lessons Learned

For Ashley, diabetes has changed and molded her life in every way possible. It has made her stronger and a firm believer in the old "adage" everything happens for a reason. It has also defined her because her health has become her first priority. Diabetes is a disease where according to Ashley; you can actually take control of your life. It forces you to become healthy in a way, to pay attention to your diet, exercise, and monitor your blood sugar. Having diabetes has made her more aware of the disease and how it affects the African-American community. By educating herself about the disease she has also become motivated to become an advocate, not just for the disease, but for healthy living and health awareness in general. She hopes that by putting a spotlight on diabetes, it will make things better for those who are newly diagnosed, knowing this disease, a chronic disease, is indeed manageable.

Bad things happen to people and they think, why me? God responds, why not you? I chose you, appointed you, for a reason. This belief is what gets me through the tough times.

Linda Parker:Coalition for African-American Health and Wellness

Linda Parker works as a nurse and diabetes educator in Tucson, AZ. She is also a member of the Coalition for African-American Health and Wellness in Tucson.

Ms. Parker works on many projects targeted towards African Americans and diabetes. Through the American Diabetes Association (ADA), they have established an outreach program that takes place every May called, Project Sunday, Project Power. This programs target is faith based organizations. ADA distributes educational information to churches and encourages them to distribute the information to their members, print announcements in the church bulletin, as well as announcements from the pulpit about the signs, symptoms, and danger of diabetes. Churches can pick any Sunday during the month of May to focus on passing on this message.

Another program whose focus is on African-Americans and diabetes is the Healthy Living for Abundant Giving program. This program's focus is education and screening. The churches are again targeted for informational education sessions as well as health screenings. During the health screenings, they do blood sugar, blood pressure, height, and weight in order to screen for risk for both diabetes and heart disease. This is an ongoing program. In addition to all these activities Ms. Parker is also on a speaker's circuit where she goes around Tucson speaking about diabetes, nutrition, and healthy living. For more information about the Coalition or diabetes activities in Tucson, please contact Ms. Parker at lparker@carondelet.org or 520 872 2067.

Aging Gracefully

I've been young and I've been old...

"In 2007, the absolute majority of deaths of American Indians (56.5 percent), Black (53.4 percent), and Hispanic (50.6 percent) residents of Arizona occurred before the age of 65 years compared to 23.7 percent among White non-Hispanics." * Living a long, productive and overall healthy life ought not be the exception, but the norm. Yet, too many times African Americans fail to live long enough to experience the fruits of their labor. Disproportionately affected by cancer, heart disease, infant mortality, and diabetes, far too many black people are passing away prematurely. Still, there are African Americans in the community who offer an example and wisdom on how to live and sustain a healthy existence. Mrs. and Mr. Bertha and Sam Solomon provide a much needed model for what longevity and overall health standards and expectations should be in Arizona's black community.

Sam and Bertha Solomon- Phoenix, Arizona

Their Story

At 78 (Bertha Solomon) and 83 (Sam Solomon), this couple has long been a part of the black community in Arizona. Mrs. Solomon, a native Arizonan, met Mr. Solomon nearly 60 years ago when they were both students at Arizona State University. Following marriage, the Solomon's went on raise four healthy and thriving children. Mrs. and Mr. Solomon have a family history of longevity. Mr. Solomon's father lived to be 86 years old while his mother sadly passed away at 58 years of age. Mrs. Solomon's mother completed an entire century of life and her father lived into his 60's. (Both are the only survivors of their siblings) Now, the proud grandparents of six successful grandchildren, Mr. and Mrs. Solomon continue to be active contributors to their community. Bertha Solomon is a life time member of Tanner Chapel A.M.E. church and is tirelessly committed to volunteering at her place of worship. Mrs. Solomon is over the homeless food program at Tanner Chapel. Through the program, Mrs. Solomon provides more than food bags, she and Mr. Solomon offer wisdom, compassion, referrals to community services and medical care, as well as sound advice.

Even in view of the health challenges, Mr. and Mrs. Solomon encounter, maintain strong and healthy self images. When invited to be interviewed about their overall health and longevity both Bertha and Sam wanted to be completely clear that they were not in perfect health. Mrs. Solomon has arthritis and hyper tension and Mr. Solomon has pain in his shoulder (requiring injections) as well as arthritis. They take these trials in stride and request assistance from their physicians in a timely manner. The couple is not burdened down or defined by illness and continue to thrive in all areas of life.

Spiritual well being, volunteering, consistent medical care, a healthy self image and physical activity are some of the key components to the Solomon's vitality and well being. Mr. Solomon faithfully walks at least one mile everyday. When advising on health habits, both Mr. and Mrs. Solomon advocate a lifestyle, that is spiritually grounded, promotes healthy eating habits, physical activity, generosity, and eliminating toxic habits in one's life. "Trust God, no smoking, no drinking, and no drugs" is Mrs. and Mr. Solomon's advice for living a long healthy life. At the same time, the couple doesn't minimize the importance of timely and consistent medical care. The Solomons are currently under the care of Dr. Holly Underwood and have been for the past five years. They expressed great satisfaction with care they receive, but they also believe being your own advocate is extremely important. Mrs. Solomon explained she couldn't recall any times she felt mistreated by the medical community because she wouldn't allow such treatment. Mr. and Mrs. Solomon provided timely advice for African Americans who desire to take charge of their health. They reiterated the importance of eating right and exercising, but they also noted how important it is to get adequate rest. The Solomons also agreed the medical community can aid in the well being of the black community, by making care and medication more accessible for all people but more specifically those who are low income.

Mr. and Mrs. Sam and Bertha Solomon provide wisdom, experience, and guidance. Yet, all they provide would be lost if they were not present or physically capable to share with the next generation. Their life and wellness exemplify what ought to be the standard and expectation of African American health and longevity within the black community.

Area Agency on Aging (AAA)

"We are a fantastic agency that allows people to live independently as they age!" This was Robin Culan, ESQ, Director of Legal Services with AAA passionate description when summarizing the agency. Onetta Revere the Ombudsman Specialist with the AAA, agrees with Robin by adding "we make it a point to never turn anyone away." First and foremost there is an AAA in every major city in Arizona. The AAA is a non-profit organization part of a national network of organizations that advocates, coordinates, plans, develops and delivers services for adults aged 60 years and older, any age for persons with HIV/AIDS, adults aged 18 years and older with disabilities and long-term care needs and family caregivers. The AAA has over 1500 volunteers within various specialized programs. The AAA has over 10 home and community based programs including the Mosaic Elder Refugee Program that provides support to elder refugees, Late Life Domestic Violence support groups, Alzheimer's counseling, Benefits Assistance Program (BAP) and 24-hour senior helpline. The agency offers support to family caregivers through trainings, support groups, respite care, and assistance for grandparents raising children. The agency offers a broad range of legal services for all eligible seniors including but not limited too power of attorney, eviction prevention, debt issues, denial of eligibility for long-term care, reasonable disability accommodations, guardianship, reverse mortgage, foreclosure scams, issues with estate inheritance, exploitation and response to legal questions. Onetta, along with several other Ombudsman Specialists, advocate for senior rights of residents in long-term care facilities and for those with disabilities regardless of age or income. They ensure every individual's discharge from long-term care is legal, safe and not the result of neglect or maltreatment. The quality of care of residents in long-term facilities is the number one concern and the Ombudsman program is put in place to be the voice of the elderly or frail. For more information call 888-783-7500.

Conclusion:

Arizonans should be aware that the African American community is experiencing at least one funeral a week. These funerals include infants, teenagers and adults under 60 years young. Few funerals were for revered older community residents (as one would expect), and most were a result of heart attacks or cancer. Statistics for mortality for African Americans are devastating. According to ADHS statistics, Arizona's African Americans constitute approximately 3.8 % of the population and yet rate highest in nine (9) of the top ten (10) chronic diseases. Couple that information with the fact that our mortality rate from chronic diseases are double, and sometimes triple that of other races. This gives us reasons to not only pause, but reflect. Now, recent statistics tell us that our women, the backbone of our community, are the fastest growing population of new HIV diagnoses. We are put on notice. We must take action.

The take action mode lends me a note of encouragement. Encouraged that we can improve, encouraged that our stories could be the key to the motivation that unlocks the door to health education, exercise, eating, and lifestyle change. All of which could improve our overall health statistics. This document could have bombarded the reader with statistics and data. We chose instead to share our stories, the stories that show what we, as a people truly are, fighters, survivors, and heroes. These stories speak to the perseverance and diligence of our people. Please do not just read these stories and say, ahh that was great. Read these stories and take action. Call a loved one to make sure they have scheduled a routine appointment. Perform self checks; take a neighbor to an appointment, join an exercise class, or start a walking group in your neighborhood. Try to turn a favorite meal into a healthier recipe. Volunteer to help at an agency that works with health and community, tell your story, and tell these stories. Do SOMETHING...and if you do, we will as community, systematically change the tapestry of Arizona by improving African American health. It was said just recently, together...yes we can.

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