

Strengthening the Community Academic Partnerships for Research

By Aimee Swartz

Closing the Gap, Working Toward Our Goal • August 2003

By partnering with locally-based organizations, universities have the means and the mission to transform their communities into safer, more productive, and healthier places. The Jackson Heart Study (JHS) in Jackson, Mississippi is one such effort. JHS is an epidemiological investigation of cardiovascular disease (CVD) among African American men and women in the Jackson metropolitan area. It is a partnership among two, local Historically Black Colleges and Universities—Jackson State University and Tougaloo College—the University of Mississippi Medical Center, the National Institutes of Health's Center for Minority Health and Health Disparities, and the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute.

“Cardiovascular mortality rates in Mississippi are the highest in the U.S. and are almost 25 percent higher than the national average,” said Cynthia Smith of the Jackson State University Medical Center.

Heart disease and stroke are the first and third killers of all Americans, with a disproportionate burden carried by African Americans. CVD is known to be higher in African Americans than all other racial and ethnic groups, but reasons for these differences have yet to be determined.

JHS studies the factors that influence the development of CVD in African American men and women. Emerging factors include genetics, racial discrimination, and socioeconomic status.

An offshoot of the Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities study, the JHS is a three-year project that began in the fall of 2000. By the end of study enrollment, there will be 6,500 African American men and women, ages 35-84, rendering it the largest CVD study conducted to date in the African American population.

“The church is the cornerstone of the African American community,” said Smith, who does outreach at local churches, spreading the word of the JHS, as well as general cardiovascular health. “The JHS was built on the premise that the community is best able to solve local problems.”

In an effort to establish an environment of trust in and support of JHS, Smith and her colleagues work to ensure that local community members are involved in every phase of the study. “We also conduct health promotion and education activities that stress the importance of healthy living, CVD disease, and other health topics,” Smith said.

“Participation in the JHS does not only identify risk factors and treatment options for CVD in African Americans, but it also provides an excellent opportunity for African Americans to leave a legacy of health for future generations,” she said. “It’s about doing ‘with’ and not doing ‘to’ the community,” she added.

For more information about the Jackson Heart Study, call 601-368-4650 or go to <http://www.jsu.edu/~jhs>

Minority Cardiovascular Disease Deaths in 2000

77,523

African Americans

25,819

Hispanics

9,101

Asians/Pacific Islanders

2,417

American Indians/Alaska Natives

Source: Health, US, 2002

The Jackson Heart Study • *Benefiting the Community*

Through community awareness, health education programs, and academic opportunities, the Jackson Heart Study aims to:

- ❖ Enhance the community’s health awareness and understanding of cardiovascular disease through seminars and workshops on cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, cholesterol, and nutrition;
- ❖ Provide insight into the development of new treatments for cardiovascular disease in African Americans;
- ❖ Assist medical professionals in their understanding, diagnosis, and treatment of cardiovascular disease in African Americans;
- ❖ Identify risk factors for cardiovascular disease in African Americans;

- ❖ Enhance research capabilities at minority institutions by developing partnerships;
- ❖ Provide an opportunity for African Americans to provide meaningful input into the development of a major research project that impacts their health;
- ❖ Provide an opportunity for African Americans to leave a legacy of health for their future generations; and
- ❖ Provide academic opportunities for minority high school students, college students, and health professionals in the health sciences.



Strengthening the Community—Academic Partnerships for Research is based on the Summit workshop of the same title.

