

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

REDUCING HEALTH DISPARITIES AFFECTING AFRICAN-AMERICANS

APRIL 18, 2002

WASHINGTON, DC

DEPUTY SECRETARY CLAUDE ALLEN: Good afternoon. Let's try that again. Good afternoon. Thank you. I'm Claude Allen, the Deputy Secretary here at the Department of Health and Human Services, and it is my privilege to welcome all of you here to the Department.

I do have an honor today, a distinct honor, to tell you today that President Bush's and Secretary Thompson's commitment that they have made to improve the health of all Americans, and to reduce the health disparities that exists in colors of community -- communities of color across our nation.

I want to thank Secretary Thompson for his bold leadership in this area and for embarking on this campaign in partnership with ABC Radio. Eliminating health disparities is not just a part of my job description; it's something that I lift very close to my heart every day.

I know personally that in communities of color, there is a basic distrust of the healthcare industry oftentimes, and this has led to delay in visits to doctors offices, even when an individual has symptoms of a serious illness.

One important area we will stress in this campaign is the importance of regular medical checkups. I personally remember as a senior in college taking my own mother to the doctor after she had been under the weather for a long time. She was diagnosed with esophageal cancer and passed away just six months thereafter and, had she caught it sooner, she could very well be here with us today. That's why it's so important that each of us can remember loved ones that we have lost because of delay in seeking care.

And so now, it's my great honor to one, introduce my boss, many of your bosses, to introduce the man who has made this campaign a reality, and that's Secretary Tommy Thompson.

Secretary Thompson is committed to the reduction of healthcare disparities and is eager to commit resources for research, for treatment, for education in this area. And this event today is just a small example of his tireless efforts on behalf of all Americans.

So will you join me in welcoming Secretary Tommy Thompson.

SECRETARY TOMMY THOMPSON: Good afternoon, ladies and gentleman. Yeah, I love that. Thank you so very much for coming. And I tell you, I can't tell you how appreciative I am every day of having Claude as my Deputy Secretary.

I don't know if you have had the opportunity to get a chance to meet Claude Allen, but he is top shelf and he is an exceptional Deputy Secretary, a great friend and a great spokesperson, and he is absolutely passionately committed to making sure that the barriers and the obstacles of making sure that everybody gets quality health is there. And I just would like to say thank you, Claude, for all that you do. You're a wonderful friend and I thank you so very much.

And Dr. Stinson (sp) -- Dr. Stinson had a difficult time getting here today. The policemen were not going to let him in. He had to stop in the traffic so he had to park and run down here. That's how good of shape he's in. And I want to thank you, Dr. Stinson, for being here and being such an advocate.

Does everybody know who Tom Joyner is? All right.

Well, we're here for a very special reason and that's to Take a Loved One to See a Doctor and we need everybody's help. We, you know, there's no reason why not. Every one of you should be committed to sign up a loved one and make sure that that takes place and take yourself at the same time.

But first, let me welcome you here to the Department of Health and Human Services and thank you very much for coming. This is a Department of compassion. It's the largest Department in the federal government. And President Bush ran as a compassionate conservative, and I tell the President every opportunity that I get that this is the Department that will define compassion and conservatism in America.

We're here today to talk about an issue that is so very important to the future of millions of our mothers, our fathers, our sisters, our brothers and friends. And that's reducing the health disparities among racial and ethnic minorities.

In addition to Deputy Secretary Claude Allen, with me today are Darryl Brown, Executive Vice President and General Manager, ABC Radio Networks, and used to play basketball for the Boston, Celtics he tells me. What a great guy and a great friend and thank you.

And that meek, mild radio personality, Tom Joyner. Thank you, Tom, for being here.

We also have Dr. Nathan Stinson, as the Office of Minority Health here at HHS, and Dr. Stinson is a committed advocate to improving minority health, and he provides sound council to us on this very important issue. And I thank you very much for coming here.

But you are the individuals that are so important, and I want to thank all of you for being here today to announce September 24 as Taking a Loved One to the Doctors Day, a Loved One to the Doctors

Day. And I want you to raise your hand if you're going to do this for me. All of you are going to -- come on, raise your hand. Thank you so very much.

This is a new HHS/ABC Radio Networks campaign to rally African-Americans and other minorities to visit a health professional, or make an appointment to see a health professional.

Today there are more advances in medical science and technology than ever before. These advances, along with an increased focus on preventative medicine, mean that more of us are living longer than our forefathers ever imagined, but we're not necessarily living healthier.

And not all Americans are benefiting equally. For too many racial and ethnic minorities in our country, good health is elusive. Health status is too correlated to race, gender and economic level. And just as important as lifestyle factors, nutrition, exercise and tobacco use, which play a key role in determining health status.

Health disparities among racial and ethnic minorities, compared to the United States population as a whole, have existed since the government started keeping track of those statistics. These disparities persist and some areas continue to grow.

African-Americans suffer disproportionately from diabetes, heart disease and other medical problems. African-Americans are twice as likely to die from diabetes than whites, for example. And I'm very, very concerned about our children. Type two diabetes is on the rise in African-American children.

And we can defeat this. We've got to watch what we eat, we've got to reduce some weight. And I'm on a diet and I've got the whole Department on a diet. And you take your children out when they come home after school and play with them on the playground instead of watching TV. Thirty minutes a day, losing 10 to 15 pounds, can reduce the incidents of diabetes by 60 percent. Now that isn't that difficult. We can do that, ladies and gentlemen, and we can live a lot healthier lives.

I'm very concerned about our children, especially African-American children. Infant mortality rates for African-American children are twice as high as for white infants. African-Americans also are 40 percent more likely to die of strokes than whites according to the latest statistics. Strokes are the third leading cause of death for all racial and ethnic groups.

And overall, the average life expectancy for African-Americans at birth is now 72 years compared to 77 years for whites. There's no need for this. We must and will reverse these trends.

The African-American community is so important, and that's why we've got to make sure the quality of health lag is left behind. The diversity of our nation is what makes us so strong and we need all of our citizens to be healthy, to be strong, and to be vibrant.

I'm here today to tell you this Department of Health and Human Services is absolutely committed to reducing these disparities, and public/private partnerships like this one will improve the health of Americans one life at a time.

For several months, HHS has had the privilege of working with Tom Joyner and all the other wonderful people at ABC Radio Networks, to increase the awareness about health disparities. And we have started together in collaboration and partnership Take a Loved One to the Doctor Day, Take a Loved One to the Doctor Day.

It's part of our larger campaign called Closing the Health Gap. This is an ongoing partnership between HHS and ABC Radio Networks, that combines HHS medical expertise with the broadcast resources of ABC Radio, to provide important health information to African-Americans.

ABC Radio's Tom Joyner chairs the national campaign, and I thank and salute him. Businessman and former NBA star Ervin "Magic" Johnson is the honorary co-chair.

And on September 24th, we're rallying African-Americans to visit a health professional or make an appointment to see a health professional. And to make this campaign a success, we need help from our communities, local businesses, health providers, health departments, community and faith-based groups and radio stations in order to promote health and wellness in their communities by organizing screenings, health fairs, as well as other events.

We already have 38 national organizations that have signed on as partners. A list of these organizations are in your press packet, and I thank these organizations and thank them very much for their support.

Ladies and gentlemen, we can help close this health gap and we can do it through knowledge. Knowledge is the key to good health in preventing disease and illness, but it takes, ladies and gentlemen, a personal commitment.

You must be involved in your healthcare personally. You must have the power to take charge of your own health. Know your family history of disease and illness. Know your weight, your cholesterol levels, and your blood sugar. Reduce or stop smoking. Exercise. Walk 30 minutes a day. Loose some weight. Make sure your children and loved ones get out and exercise with you.

If you don't exercise, start. Just 30 minutes of walking a day can have a significant impact on your health. And a lot of people don't think walking really is exercise. Ladies and gentlemen, it's some of the best exercise there is. Thirty minutes a day is all it takes, seven days a week.

Reduce your risk of diabetes, heart disease and stroke. If you smoke, stop. Eat your fruit and vegetables--your broccoli and spinach, ladies and gentlemen.

We have more information about this campaign on our hotline, 1-800-444-6472. Or you can check out the Web site, www.healthgap.omhrc.gov.

All Americans -- all Americans can benefit from heeding this health advice. Let's work together to make and reduce health disparities and make this campaign a success, as well as make all Americans healthier.

And now I'm very pleased to be able to introduce an individual I just met but I immediately liked, an individual who I think is a wonderful leader and a great spokesperson, Darryl Brown, who's the Executive Vice President, General Manager at ABC Radio Networks.

Darryl is a 20-plus year veteran of ABC Radio, responsible for ABC Radio Networks' overall operations. And ABC Radio, I want to say, is a shining example of corporate citizenship. ABC realized that they could have a profound impact on the lives of their listeners and they came to us to combine our medical expertise with their broadcast resources to provide important health information to the African-American population.

I commend ABC for their commitment to improving the good health of all Americans, and I thank them for donating thousands of dollars of air time to support this campaign.

Will you show all our appreciation as the HHS family and give Darryl a big round of applause and ask him to come up and speak.

MR. DARRYL BROWN: I have to crank this up a little bit first of all. I really want to say good afternoon, first of all. And second of all, this is, you know, ABC Radio is passionate about this entire effort because we realize the power of radio. It's about community, and what vehicle reaches the community better than radio.

ABC Radio Networks is extremely proud to be in this groundbreaking partnership with the Department of Health Human Services, to close the Health Gap that exists between African-Americans and the general population.

As Secretary Thompson has already said, many of these diseases are preventable and can be managed with proper awareness, treatment and preventative actions by both individuals and the healthcare infrastructure that provides services to the African-American community.

As an integral part of the African-American community, through our extensive programming, ABC Radio Networks programming reaches over 17 million African-Americans every week. We felt that we had an ideal platform for communicating the state of African-American health to the people who needed to know about it most -- mainly African-Americans.

Not only do we have this incredible reach, but we also have Tom Joyner and Doug Banks, who have the trust of the African-American community because they have always championed causes that benefit their listeners: education, employment, equality and, of course, improved health.

So we approached HHS about a year ago to see if we could combine the strengths of both organizations to really make a difference and to actually improve the health of African-Americans in this country. We were very pleased when they said yes, let's do this together.

Since then, ABC Radio Networks and its affiliates have donated over \$4 million of air time -- not to correct you, Secretary, but it's \$4 million of air time.

At this time, I would like for you to hear Secretary Thompson's PSA as he gets his message out to the African-American Community.

ANNOUNCER: Fourteen before the hour on the Tom Joyner Morning Show.

SECRETARY THOMPSON: Heart disease, diabetes, cancer and other serious illnesses hit African-Americans at high rates, but it doesn't have to be that way. This is Tommy Thompson, Secretary of Health and Human Services. My Department is working with ABC Radio to help education the nation about these health concerns. Please team with us so we can eliminate the health gap. Call 1-800-444-6472 for health information that could add years to your life. We can build a healthier America together, one person and one family at a time.

MR. BROWN: So we have come here today under the leadership of one of the most influential voices in the African-American community, Tom Joyner, to announce the launch of an historic grass roots campaign that will galvanize the African-American community around the importance of health.

I'd like to bring back Secretary Thompson.

SECRETARY THOMPSON: Thank you. Thank you so very much, Darryl, and thank you for being here, your leadership and your support for this wonderful cause and I thank you so very much.

And now it really my pleasure to introduce an individual I also just met. I've talked to him on the telephone several times, an individual that is the host of the nationally syndicated Tom Joyner Morning Show. Give him a big hand, yeah.

Just listen to this. Tom's radio show is heard daily on more than 240 -- 240 ABC Radio Urban Advantage Network Affiliates, and around the world on the American Forces Radio and Television Service. Tom's personal commitment is passion. His leadership to closing the health gap has absolutely been critical to this campaign's success.

And so I want us to give this guy a big round of applause and thank him so very much for serving as the Chairman of Taking a Loved One to the Doctor Day, and for all that he does and is doing and will do to improve African-Americans' health.

It is my privilege and distinct honor to be able to introduce Tom Joyner.

MR. TOM JOYNER: Thank you. My Easter suit -- my wife bought it for me after she put me on a diet.

Two years ago, when my two sons and I launched BlackAmericaWeb.com, a company designed to benefit African-American users of the World Wide Web, we were concerned mostly with the technology gap. Too many minorities lagged behind when it came to owning and using personal computers and the Internet. Until that gap is closed, black people will have difficulty competing in education, employment, commerce and will not have access to the fastest and most up to date information that mainstream America has.

And that concerned me. And I wanted to be involved personally with closing the technology gap. And I feel even more passionate about closing the health gap.

If we don't, African-Americans will continue to be leaders in AIDS, HIV, leaders in diabetes, leaders in hypertension, breast cancer, heart disease, and the list goes on and on. And this is not the kind of leadership we need.

I bet everyone here today knows someone near and dear to them that suffers from one of those ailments. And many of who have the problems -- have those problems are not even aware that they exist.

And because we know that early detection is the key to beating many of these diseases, I'm very excited to announce the launch of Take a Loved One to the Doctor Day, and I think the title really says it all.

Think of a person you love who hasn't been to the doctor lately. Make an appointment for them, then actually physically take them to the doctor. If they don't have health insurance, they can contact their local community health center or health department, or they can go to tomjoyner.com for details on low cost healthcare.

On the Tom Joyner Morning Show each morning, we're heard in a lot of cities, broadcasting to mostly African-Americans. And while we have a good time joking and entertaining, not a day goes by that we aren't reminded of the serious health issues that are so prevalent in our communities.

Our audience members, our co-workers, even the members of the Tom Joyner Morning Show crew, are no strangers to many of the illnesses that we discussed today.

We each have suffered personal losses and would cherish the chance to have had the knowledge that we have now about the importance of early detection. The good news is we get a fresh start today.

When we launch Take a Doctor -- Take a Loved One to the Doctor, we want you to do just that. Take a loved one to the doctor, physically take them, drag them if you have to. And then afterwards, hey, have a barbecue--watch the pork, cut back on the fat and the cholesterol.

I think everyone here -- let's see, let's do a little survey, a little impromptu unofficial survey. Anyone here that is suffering from any of the diseases that I just talked about -- AIDS, HIV, diabetes, hypertension, breast cancer, stand up.

All right. Anyone -- keep standing -- anyone that knows someone in their family that has suffered from any of these diseases, stand up.

Anyone that knows someone very close to them: coworker, neighbor, that has suffered from any of these diseases, stand up.

Now, I take it that all of us at one time have been to the doctor to see about these ailments. The idea is to take someone that you love, someone that you care about, to the doctor.

This is our proactive stance on closing the disparity of the health gap. That's what we're here about. That's what we're here to talk about today. And the day that we're going to do it is September 24th. September 24th will be Take a Loved One to the Doctor Day.

And we'll be encouraging people on the show, we'll be encouraging people everywhere we go. And I thank all of the organizations that have come together today to help us do this. Thank you very much. We've got work to do in our community.

Thank you.

SECRETARY THOMPSON: Thank you so very much, Tom, and I personally want to thank you. Two of my assistants in my office, Linda and Mary, said that if they could just shake your hand it would make their day, and they would have a smile on their face the rest of the week. You had your picture taken with them so, Mary and Linda, that's a smile for a month.

I want to thank you, Tom, and above all I want to thank all of you for coming. And now you've got the marching orders, you know what you have to do. Are we going to do it?

Thank you so very much and God love you.

END

© Federal Network, Inc.

www.fednet.net

202-393-7300