

**HEALTHWIRE**

**STRESS, CULTURE, AND HYPERTENSION**

**PART I**

*By Malaika Brown*

Hypertension, also called high blood pressure, affects more than 60 million Americans over the age of six. Doctors call hypertension "the silent killer," because in many instances it's victims are unaware that they suffer from the disease. Symptoms of hypertension, which may or may not surface, include headaches, dizziness, shortness of breath and fatigue. Severe

cases can lead to heart attacks, stroke, and paralysis.

Medical experts know that hypertension is most prevalent in minority groups, particularly African Americans. What is still hotly debated, however, is what roles genetics and culture play in the development of the disease. What is known is that men are more at risk than women; African Americans have a higher prevalence rate than whites; and that the chances of an individual

developing hypertension are increased if his or her parents have high blood pressure.

**African American Communities at Risk**

African Americans are twice as likely as whites to suffer from hypertension. A 1990 study by the National Center for Health Statistics found that of 1,000 African Americans between the

ages of 45 and 64, 367 are hypertensive. Whites compare at 204 cases per 1,000.

Dr. Robert G. Robinson, director of program development at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, says the major risk for African Americans probably has more to do with environment and stress that it does body composition. Dr. Keith Ferdin-

and, Medical Director of the Heartbeats Life Center in New Orleans, says that "one should not overlook the important impact social and economic inequality in terms of income, occupation, and access to health care many have on the prevalence and severity of high blood pressure and coronary heart disease in people of color."

Robinson concurs, "The stability of a community very much contributes to whether a community is going to experience high levels of hypertension." Essentially what we are seeing is a people experiencing a higher level of instability."

Robinson's assertion is supported by the fact that Africans, who live in rural areas in their native countries do not have significantly high levels of hypertension. While Africans living in urban settings have a higher prevalence of hypertension than their rural counterparts.

Dr. Clarence E. Grim, at Drew University School of Medicine disagrees. He believes that a salt-retaining gene passes from Africans to their descendants is the key to increased risk for African Americans. Recent work by the Veterans Administration also found a genetic connection in hypertension treatments. They discovered that of all the medications available for hypertension, African American men respond best to calcium channel blockers, while white men get the best results from ACE inhibitors.

*(See Healthwire, Page 26)*

**ATTENTION LUNG PATIENTS!**

The Better Breathers Club will hold its monthly meeting on Wednesday, December 15, 1993 at 1:15 p.m. in the Parish Hall, Christ Church Episcopal, 2000 S. Maryland Parkway. It is time for the 1993 Better Breathers Club Party! We will have a potluck lunch again this year, so everyone must bring a side dish, salad or dessert. The main entree will be donated by Hi-Tech Health Care. Door prizes will be given away too! Sponsored by the American Lung Association of Nevada, the Better Breathers Club is an educational and emotional support group for lung patients and their families. There are no dues or membership fees. For more information, contact Corinne Johnson at the American Lung Association of Nevada at 454-2500.

**HEALTH**

**HEALTH PROGRAM ORIENTATIONS BEGIN THIS MONTH AT THE CCSN**

The Community College of Southern Nevada's nursing program will be the focus of an orientation to be held Wednesday, December 15, 1993, at 4 p.m. in room B169 on the West Charleston Campus. A general orientation covering all health programs will be held at the same

location on Thursday, December 16, 1993, at 4 p.m.

This will begin a series of free orientations offered monthly by The CCSN health admissions advising office. The series will continue on January 18, 1994 with an orientation on the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program. This orientation is scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. in the West Charleston Library Auditorium.

An Associate of Applied Science degree can be earned in

the following health programs at The CCSN: Dental Hygiene, Emergency Medicine/Paramedic, Health Information Technology, Medical Lab Technician, Nursing (Registered) and Physical Therapist Assistant.

Certificates of Achievement and Certificates of Completion are available in other health programs. For more information on these orientations or any of the health programs offered by The CCSN call 877-1133 ext. 452.

**AFRICAN AMERICAN HEALTH WATCH**

Is it true that high blood pressure hits African-Americans harder than other ethnic groups in America?

Unfortunately, it is true. Compared to the general population, more African-Americans have high blood pressure and more than four times as many die from high blood pressure each year. We also suffer greater damage from high blood pressure - more kidney failure, more strokes and more heart failure. That's why it is so important for all African-Americans to have their blood pressure checked and controlled.

How do I know if I have high blood pressure?

Since there are usually no symptoms to alert you, the only way you can tell for sure is to have your blood pressure measured by a nurse, doctor or other

**AFRICAN-AMERICANS HIT HARDER BY HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE**

trained health professional. There are even automatic blood pressure machines in grocery stores and pharmacies, but results from these should be confirmed by a health professional.

What can I do if I have high blood pressure?

Good news. There are lots of ways to get your blood pressure in control. If you smoke, quit smoking. Cut back on salt in your diet, since African-Americans are often more susceptible to its effects on blood pressure. If you are overweight, lose some pounds. Exercise regularly, take your high

blood pressure medicine faithfully, and work with your doctor to develop the plan that works for you.

I've tried several high blood pressure drugs, but they all make me feel tired or depressed. What should I do?

High blood pressure medicines often cause such side effects, including impotence, however many choices are available. All of us are different, so be persistent in finding the medication that's right for you. High blood pressure is too dangerous to ignore.



Dr. Keith Ferdinand is a cardiologist and director of the Heartbeats Life Center in New Orleans. "African American Health Watch" is a public service feature supported by Marion Merrell Dow Inc., maker of cardiovascular medications. Please address your health questions to "African American Health Watch," 4600 Madison Ave., Suite 1300, Kansas City, MO 64112.

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