

HEALTH

Kaiser Permanente denies charges of racism, supports Diversity

(Part 2)

By Chauncey Bailey
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Executives for Kaiser Permanente are denying charges by African-Americans that the HMO has practiced institutional racism, and the officials said a closer review of the record shows the company embraces diversity.

However, charges of workplace bias will be investigated, a Kaiser official vowed this week.

"The allegations that are mentioned in the July 2 (*Sun Reporter*) article are unfortunate and alarming, and are cause for concern and attention," said Tom Williamson, Vice President of Human Resources, California Division.

In a statement, he added: "It's unfortunate that the employees have chosen to remain anonymous, because we are unable to investigate their specific claims. Despite this, we will be doing a thorough investigation of any issues which may be perceived as related to race and age. To the extent that we find problems, we'll act upon them."

African-American nurses and other staffers, some of whom are considering a class action lawsuit, maintain there has been a pattern of racism. Blacks are denied opportunities and are often victimized by a double standard: one for

whites and the other for minorities.

During a series of private interviews with *The Sun Reporter* they also expressed a desire to remain anonymous, fearing they might be punished or fired for speaking out. They also stressed that to describe their individual plights in great detail would be tantamount to revealing their identities.

They expressed no confidence in Kaiser's internal processes to handle and rectify complaints and that is why they came to the media and the NAACP.

They now hope as more victims come forward to the NAACP, conditions and procedures to address wrongs will improve. If not, the lawsuit will be pressed. Meanwhile, civil rights leaders with the NAACP are willing to hear more.

And insiders at Kaiser said the charges have already sparked a willingness by Kaiser to address concerns.

Still, Kaiser maintains, in general there is no pattern of bias.

A high ranking minority at Kaiser, Richard Cordova, Senior Vice President and Service Manager, East Bay, said: "I am personally committed to fair treatment and equal opportunity for all employees. If there are some

current issues that need to be fixed, I personally want to know about them and to be involved in making them right."

Cordova added: "I've been working in the health care industry for 25 years and Kaiser Permanente is known for making contributions to minority communities. That was one of the reasons I came to work here in March."

And, Ronald Knox, who is African-American, and Vice President of Diversity at Kaiser, said: "I think that Kaiser Permanente's position with respect to support and advocacy of equal opportunity has been well documented and dates back to the program's beginning. In the late 1950s, prior to the Civil Rights Act, Henry J. Kaiser, one of the founding members of the organization, ended the practice of segregating Caucasian patients from African-Americans. This was the prevailing practice at the time."

Kaiser media spokespersons also noted that there is a Kaiser National Diversity Council, some 18 senior executives of all races, that sets diversity policy.

A statement also revealed: some 32 percent of Kaiser managers in California are minorities and nationwide the rate is 26 percent

Also nationwide, about 40 percent of the

Kaiser workforce are racial minorities and in California the level is 48 percent.

Kaiser has eight divisions and one is lead by an African-American male president.

Kaiser also has an African-American Professional Association, and similar groups for other minorities. Each was given start up grants. "These staff associations were formulated to provide support to employees," Knox said. "They also serve to build a link with the community and enable different constituencies to have a voice at the table."

Also, of the four Physicians In Chief, one is a Black male.

The former vice president of the East Bay Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc., and Kaiser Foundation Hospitals is also an African-American male and in February he was promoted to president of the Kaiser Permanente's Central East Division.

A 14 member East Bay Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc., and the Kaiser Foundation Hospitals Leadership team includes two black males.

In the area of specialty clinics for health care members, Kaiser has Chinese and Latino modules in San Francisco and one is planned for African-Americans.

"IT'S ABOUT YOUR HEALTH"

Faith, positive thinking and knowledge of self are keys to abundant health

By Marilyn Johnson Kondwani, M.A.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In a survey taken last year by the Research Coalition on Health Care, 81 percent of Americans age 18 to 34 said they'd like to have more information so they would feel more confident about making their medical care decisions.

In response to this great need, twice a month, "It's About Your Health" will nourish your mind, body and spirit with the latest health news, product reviews, and interviews from leading experts in the field of modern and alternative health.

If you want to live a long, healthy life, have faith and think positively!

With the current upheaval in the healthcare delivery and benefits system, taking charge of your health is more important than ever. No amount of doctors' advice, pills, diets, surgical procedures, or even prayer from others can make you healthy if you do not think positively.

Since we have all been blessed with a body and a brain, why does it seem that those who achieve abundant health, happiness, and prosperity are exceptional while sickness, suffering, depression and poverty appear to have control over the majority of us?

The most powerful disease fighting combination is faith in God and positive thinking. Just ask Magic Johnson who beat the odds and now tests negative for HIV, or runner Wilma Rudolph who refused to let polio stand in the way of winning an Olympic Gold Medal.

There are countless others who have earned a clean bill of health by defeating sickness and disease. You can rest assured faith and positive thinking will work for you, too.

The miracles of modern scientific research along with extensive health education campaigns have brought about a longer life expectancy for many people. The incidence of life threatening diseases like cancer and AIDS have even dropped

slightly in the White community.

Unfortunately, for African-Americans and people of color worldwide, the statistics are not so promising.

Homicide, obesity, cancer, diabetes, AIDS, high blood pressure, heart disease, and other deadly illnesses plague the African-American community at a disproportionately higher rate than in the White community.

Recent studies indicate that an African-American man is twice as likely to die from the complications of high blood pressure than a White male. Even though Black women contract breast cancer at a lower rate than White women, their mortality rate is higher.

"It's About Your Health," a health education resource for the body, mind, and spirit, wants to hear from you. Send your questions and comments to 414 S. Craig Street #271, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213. Next time: How to communicate more effectively with your doctor

Hikers: Summer season ripe for the tick-borne diseases

Hikers beware: Summer is the peak season for tick-borne illness.

Travelers to grassy, wooded areas should take extra precautions against getting ticks on them, according to Dr. Wayne J. Riley, director of the Travel Medicine Service at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

Ticks are most likely to be picked up when you brush against vegetation on which they're perched. Because they are so tiny, you might not feel their bite.

But when they anchor themselves to your skin to feed on blood, they inject organisms that can cause diseases such as Rocky Mountain spotted fever, Colorado tick fever and Lyme disease, an illness characterized by a rash, chills, fatigue, fever, joint pain, and damage to the heart and nervous system.

To keep ticks away, soak or spray clothes with insecticide called permethrin and allow them to air dry before packing. To deter ticks from biting, apply an insect repellent containing DEET on your exposed skin.

If you find a tick on your skin, don't squeeze or crush it; that can inject more harmful organisms into your blood. Remove the tick with tweezers or a special device sold in sporting goods stores. If there is evidence the tick has been feeding on your body, such as a tick engorged with blood, see a physician for antibiotic therapy.

Eating ethnic foods can be healthy

Special to Sentinel-Voice

HOUSTON — If you thought your healthy eating plan consisted of ordering Chinese take-out, then think again.

Nutrition experts at The DeBakey Heart Center at Baylor College of Medicine and The Methodist Hospital in Houston say an ethnic diet is not always a healthy one. The key is knowing what to order.

"Ethnic restaurants tend to Americanize traditional dishes by adding fatty ingredients like cheese and nuts," said Lynne Scott, a registered dietitian and director of the Diet Modification Clinic at Baylor and Methodist. "With so many unfamiliar ingredients found in ethnic cuisines, it can be difficult to identify low-fat foods."

Scott says ethnic cuisine has become popular in recent years.

A National Restaurant Association survey revealed that the three most popular ethnic cuisines in the United States are Chinese, Italian and Mexican.

Many ethnic restaurants serve large portions. Scott says moderation can also help keep your fat intake low.

"If you cannot finish your meal, request a carry-out bag and have your leftovers for lunch," Scott said. "Or, if you're eating with a group, order one less entree than the number of people."

Scott recommends the following ethnic eating out tips:

- Call ahead to learn what low-fat items are offered. Some ethnic restaurants offer heart healthy items and cooked-to-order items so that you can request less fat in your food.

Scott recommends the following tips for ordering

lower-fat ethnic foods:

- Request that creamy dressing and sauces be served on the side so you can control the amount you use.
- Forgo deep-fried appetizers and side orders such as tempura, egg rolls, nachos and fried mozzarella cheese.
- When ordering Chinese, order steamed rice instead of fried rice.
- When ordering fajitas, choose chicken instead of beef

and request that sauce not be added.

- Request corn tortillas instead of flour tortillas, which have about four times the amount of fat in corn tortillas.

- Order plain, steamed or grilled vegetables, fish and chicken without adding fatty oil or butter.

The DeBakey Heart Center is a joint program of Baylor College of Medicine and The Methodist Hospital.

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