

Insurance plan changes hurting children in Texas

By Marian Wright Edelman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Viridiana Herrera is a freshman at the University of Texas and the first person in her family to attend college. For the last three years, she led her high school's efforts to sign up hundreds of Houston children for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) through annual enrollment drives at neighborhood Fiesta Supermarkets

and other events. But CHIP enrollment wasn't just another community service project for Viridiana. She and her brother and sister are all CHIP recipients. They are among the thousands of children served by the program since it was started in 1997.

CHIP is designed primarily to help children in working families with incomes too high to qualify for Medicaid but too low to afford private

family coverage. Right now there are more than 9 million children in the United States without health care coverage. Close to 90 percent of these uninsured children have at least one parent who works, but many of these families' employers don't offer affordable health coverage. Nearly 6 million of these children are eligible for either CHIP or Medicaid. All states and
(See Children, Page 12)

Chapman

(Continued from Page 3)

went along with the persona he had developed. Although they have separated, Chapman's wife, Valerie, wrote a letter to Judge Quarles and asked for leniency.

As he stood before the judge, he said that he had never been in trouble before. "I never intended to defraud anyone," Chapman said. "I never in a million years thought I'd end up in a courtroom." Chapman showed humility and respect for the court and thanked Judge Quarles for the "respect you've shown me in this courtroom."

"The sentence reflects the fact that Chapman dashed the hopes and dreams of Black people by mismanaging their

money," said a local attorney, not affiliated with the case. "Chapman should have pled guilty and spared the court the expense. Instead, he ran for cover in the Black community. He did not have the courage to admit that he was losing money, and instead lied, cheated and covered it up. Chapman did all Black money managers in the country a disservice." Chapman's lawyers immediately filed a notice of their intent to appeal. His lawyers have asked the judge to let Chapman remain free while his appeals are pending. Judge Quarles indicated that he would rule on the request after hearing from prosecutors.

Roderick C. Willis writes for Afro Newspapers.

Drugs

(Continued from Page 1)

ahead of schedule last year when doctors saw BiDil clearly was better.

After roughly two years' use, only 6.2 percent of the patients who took BiDil had died versus 10.2 percent who got only standard heart failure drugs. That translates to a 43 percent reduction in deaths, said Dr. Anne Taylor of the University of Minnesota, one of the study's leaders.

Only 16.4 percent on BiDil required hospitalization for heart failure, versus 24.4 percent of the rest.

BiDil had substantial side effects — 47.5 percent on it had headaches, compared with 19.2 of the others. Dizziness occurred in 29.3 percent on the drug and 12.3 percent on fake pills.

But the favorable overall result "virtually ensures FDA approval," because the agency previously told the company that a successful study in Blacks would merit it, Dr. M. Gregg Bloche, a Georgetown University lawyer and Johns Hopkins University physician, said in a commentary in the medical journal.

That is "cause for celebration" for Blacks, but the company now will have no financial incentive to do a larger trial in Whites because its "Black-only" patent allows it to sell it that way and keep generic versions from coming the market until 2020, he said.

Others worried that the drug might not be the best choice for every Black but that they will automatically be prescribed "the Black pill" solely on the basis of skin color.

Being Black is not a black-and-white distinction, said Dr. Timothy Gardner of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, who had no role in the study. "Physiologically, it's a sort of continuous variable," including people of mixed races, he said.

Dr. Shamir Mehta, a heart expert from McMaster University in Ontario who has done much research on ethnic differences, said the genetic differences among ethnic groups are so small that the drug should probably help Whites, too.

The early studies in the 1980s that found no benefit from the two chemicals in Whites were done before modern heart failure drugs were available, and that could warrant a new study involving all races, experts noted.

"We don't know how the broad population treated with appropriate background therapy would respond to this compound," said Dr. Clyde W. Yancy, a heart specialist at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas who participated in the study.

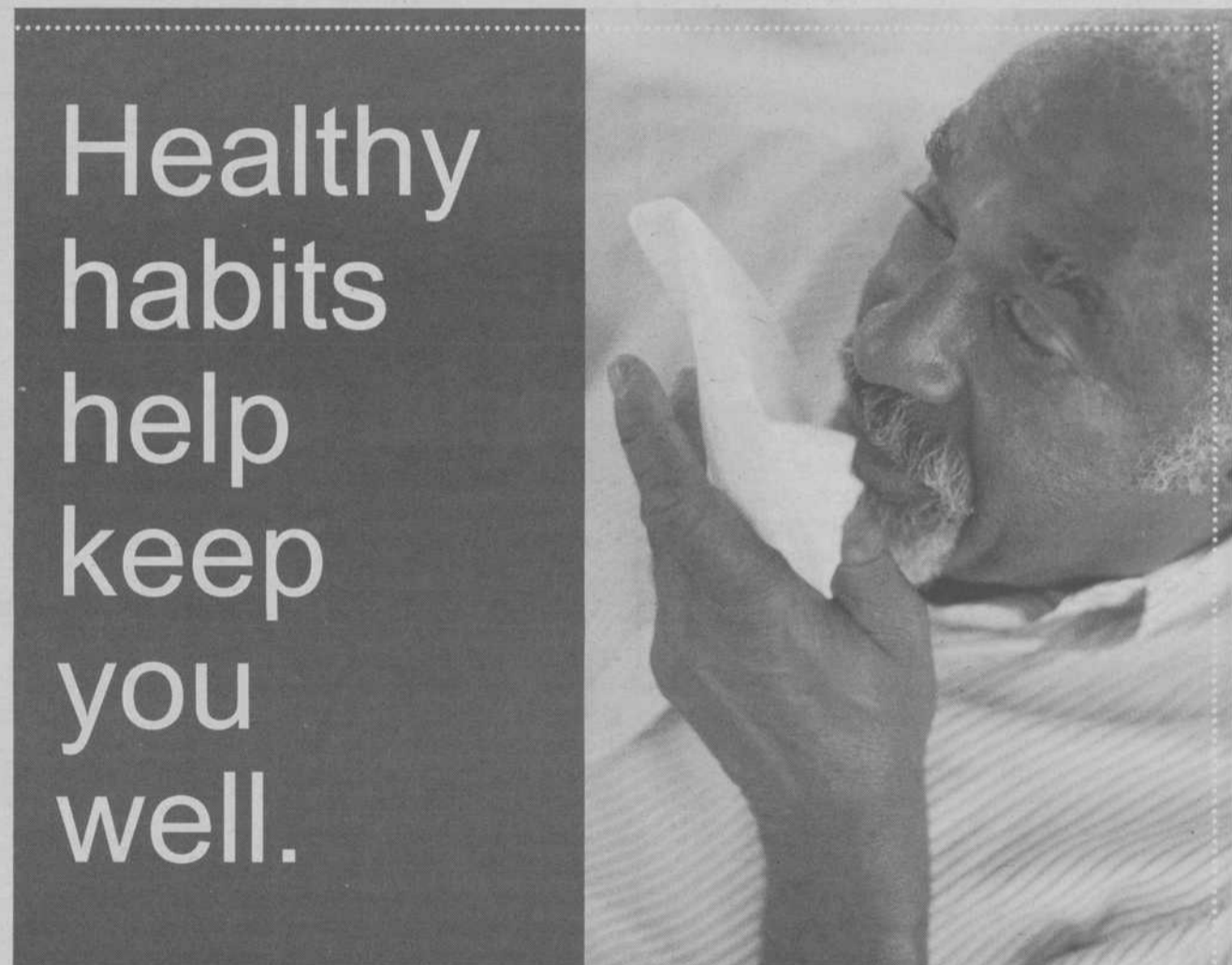
The FDA could choose to approve the drug generally for heart failure with a statement saying it had been tested only on Blacks, he said.

NitroMed's vice president for marketing, B.J. Jones, said the company would submit all results to the FDA and let the agency decide.

Meanwhile, experts say it is a watershed event in efforts to develop race-based medicine.

"In 2001 it was almost a fringe concept" that was highly controversial, Yancy said. "The idea was that all this would do would be further polarize medicine and have practitioners make decisions based on race: What does this person look like? There has been a relaxing of the animosity about doing this kind of study."

Dr. Raymond Gibbons, a Mayo Clinic cardiologist who had no role in the research, said: "To these investigators' credit, they didn't give up on the idea," and pursued testing the drug for Blacks. "It's an admirable attempt to focus therapy on the group they thought would most benefit."



Healthy habits help keep you well.

Healthy habits can protect you and those around you from getting sick or spreading germs at home, work and school. These simple actions can help to prevent illness:

- Cover your mouth and nose. Use a tissue when you cough or sneeze and drop it in the trash. If you do not have a tissue, cover your mouth and nose as best you can.
- Clean your hands often. Clean your hands every time you cough or sneeze. Hand washing stops germs. Alcohol-based gels and wipes also work well.
- Remind children to practice healthy habits, too. Germs that cause colds, coughs, flu and pneumonia can spread easily.

HEALTHY HABITS STOP GERMS. AT HOME, WORK AND SCHOOL.

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