

Health disparities among minority populations getting worse

Written by

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WARSAW, IN -- Despite government efforts to address disparities in the past decade, beginning with President Clinton's 1998 Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Initiative, there has been very little progress. African Americans have more disease, disability, and early death than Caucasians(1).

The statistics are alarming:

- African Americans are 1.6 times more likely to have diabetes than non-Latino Caucasians.(2)
- African Americans have higher death rates for coronary heart disease (CHD), coronary artery disease (CAD), and stroke.(3)
- The prevalence of high blood pressure among African Americans is among the highest in the world.(4)
- There is an estimate that 80% of black women and 60% of black men are overweight or obese (which contributes to heart disease, certain cancers, high blood pressure, diabetes among other chronic health conditions). (5).
- African American women are 3 times more likely to have lupus than Caucasian women. (6)
- African Americans are 38% less likely to get joint replacement to alleviate chronic joint pain than Caucasians.(7)

While health disparities worsen for African Americans, according to Verona Brewton, Zimmer's Director of Minority Initiatives, African Americans can take control by focusing on those individual behaviors that positively impact one's health.

"Whether you suffer from heart disease, diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure or another chronic health condition, there is a key factor that will make a difference in your quality of life - exercise," said Brewton.

Keeping weight under control plays a critical role in managing these health issues. However, many African Americans face a major hurdle: they are living with chronic joint pain.

"Every warning from governmental and non-profit health organizations implores our community to 'get moving' because of the positive impact it has on combating these conditions," said Brewton. "But we have failed to make the direct link between painful movement and poor health."

That's the situation that Stephanie Mace and Jean Pompey faced. Mace was severely overweight and battling other chronic health conditions. After joint replacement, she regained her mobility and was able to exercise, losing 100 pounds, which improved her overall health.

Jean Pompey suffered from arthritis - causing severe joint pain and her legs to bow two inches. After joint replacement restored her ability to exercise, Pompey was able to lose weight and manage her other chronic health conditions.

Early intervention is key as there are many options to alleviate joint pain. Knee or hip discomfort should not be dismissed as one of the natural signs of aging without discussing it with a primary care physician. Today's treatment options offer non-surgical solutions, which provide temporary

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pain relief and more permanent solutions such as joint replacement. Total knee replacement (TKR) is an effective method of reducing pain and improving physical function among those with disabling knee osteoarthritis. However, a February 2009 report from the Centers For Disease Control (CDC) revealed health disparities for African Americans in getting joint replacement have worsened, from 37% to 39% between 2000 and 2006.(7) Although doctors performed 58% more total knee replacement procedures between 2000 and 2006, African-Americans were 39% less likely than Caucasians to get joint replacement.(7)

Regaining mobility and being active is critical in helping to manage and defeat chronic health conditions. Healthcare disparities for African Americans in getting joint replacement represent a serious healthcare barrier. Zimmer's Back In The Groove[®] program is an education-based community partnership that addresses healthcare disparities impacting African-Americans in the area of joint replacement. For more information, visit www.backinthegroove.zimmer.com or call 1-866-923-2345.

(1) Minority Women's Health - African Americans - National Women's Health Information Center, US Dept of Health and Human Services, 2008

(2) Diabetes Statistics For African Americans - American Diabetes Association, www.diabetes.org 2008

(3) African Americans and Cardiovascular Disease - American Heart Association Statistical Fact Sheet 2007 update.

(4) See reference above

(5) Losing the War on Weight - Obesity Rates Growing For African-Americans. Black Enterprise May 2007

(6) Minority Women's Health > African Americans > Health Topics > Lupus - National Womens Health Information Center, US Dept of Health and Human Services, 2008

(7) Racial Disparities in Total Knee Replacement Among Medicare Enrollees - MMWR Weekly, Centers For Disease Control - February 20, 2009