

APRIL CONFERENCE AT MOREHOUSE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE TO CHART NEW COURSE ON FIGHTING HEALTH DISPARITIES

Atlanta, GA (BlackNews.com) - Just over a year ago, a 12-year-old boy, Deamonte Driver, went to a hospital in Maryland's Prince Georges County and was diagnosed with a tooth abscess and sinusitis. He was given antibiotics and sent home. A few weeks later, his mother, Alyce Driver, was burying her son. She couldn't afford the \$80 to have Deamonte's tooth extracted, and bacteria from the infected tooth migrated to his brain and killed him. Deamonte Driver became another victim of the health disparities that grip this nation. All across the country, African American men, women and children suffer and die prematurely because people of color are in far poorer health than whites,

and are more likely not to have health insurance. African Americans suffer disproportionately from diseases ranging from heart disease, to diabetes and certain cancers. And the infant mortality rate for African Americans is higher than any other demographic in our society. Belatedly, experts have come to realize there is no single reason for health disparities -- there are many. African Americans are in poor health because of their total environment. Clearly, the combinations of social and economic conditions under which people of color live are the determinants that ultimately impact our health. These conditions

include income level, social status, social supports, political environment, education, employment, ecological environment, and culture -- just to name a few.

Moreover, these factors exacerbate health disparities in the most vulnerable populations, including the poor in urban and rural areas, immigrants, adults and juveniles re-entering life after prison, and the homeless.

Data paints a bleak picture of African Americans at risk from the moment their lives begin in the mother's womb. Health disparities are devastating urban and rural communities alike, burdening our families and friends. To be sure, racism and discrimination play a role in the health crisis that blacks face. The Institute of Medicine issued a report entitled "Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Healthcare" documenting that minorities receive a lower quality of healthcare even when insurance status and incomes are considered. Researchers found that stereotyping, biases, and uncertainty on the part of healthcare providers all contributed to the unequal treatment.

Consider these statistics:

* The infant mortality rate for blacks is 13.5 per 1,000 live



By Dr. Henrie M. Treadwell

or ethnic group.* African American men have the highest death rate of any racial or ethnic group. Unfortunately, the millions spent examining health disparities have yielded few results. Only recently have researchers begun to understand that to improve the health of African Americans, their total environment must be considered, and acted upon. From

April 9 to 11, the Community Voices Initiative at the National Center for Primary Care at Morehouse School of Medicine will host an assembly of the nation's leaders in civil rights and health disparities to discuss the relationship between poor health and inequities in our society. The First Annual Freedom's Voice Conference at Morehouse School of Medicine hopes to plot a new direction in the fight against health disparities. Participants from the nation's leading think-tanks, universities, government and health industry will participate in the panel discussions, as well as present case studies and interactive presentations. Sessions will include: Underserved Populations: The Social Determinants of Health; Incarceration and Reentry: Addressing the Health of Those Returning Home; Innovators: Mayors Speak Out about Reentry; Legislative and Legal Strategies to Address the Collateral Impacts of Incarceration and Reentry; and The Role of News Media in the Health Disparities Dialogue.

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