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Unequal health

Despite advances in public health in recent decades, the health of Black Americans lags behind that of whites by virtually every measure. That is the conclusion reached by William A. Darity, Ph.D., Dean of the School of Health Sciences at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, after ten years of research on the nation's health policies and their results.



Darity presented his analysis in an address called "Disparities in American Health between Blacks and Whites," delivered as the first Annual William A. Hinton Lecture. (See related article on page 2.) Darity's presentation was jointly sponsored by DPH and the Harvard School of Public Health to mark Black History Month.

Recent reports in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and the *New York Times* have also described disparities in health care, disease and mortality rates between

Blacks and whites in America. For example, Black Americans have significantly less access to health care than whites regardless of income. Blacks are less satisfied with the care they receive from both doctors and hospitals, and are more likely to believe they were discharged from the hospital too soon.

Other studies have shown that Black Americans on dialysis get only half as many kidney transplants as white men, even though the rate of kidney failure among Blacks is triple the rate among whites. Similarly, Blacks suffer higher rates of heart disease but receive fewer coronary bypass operations than whites. The rate of AIDS cases — especially pediatric AIDS cases — is disproportionately high among Black Americans, but Blacks are underrepresented in clinical trials of new medicines.

These and other disparities in health care are at least partially responsible for differences in death rates. Despite overall improvements in infant mortality rates, the Black infant mortality rate is still double that of whites. Black Americans of any age are 50% more likely to die than whites.

Advances in public health cannot be considered true progress when entire segments of the population lag behind. The Department's mission to protect and improve the health of the people clearly means *all* the people of Massachusetts. Black History Month gives us an opportunity to focus our attention on the health issues of particular concern to the Black community, one of many we serve.

A

Saving young lives

Not too long ago, children born with sickle cell anemia weren't expected to live long enough to become teenagers. Many died of severe bacterial infections before they were three years old.



These children's lives are being saved today thanks to a simple treatment. In 1986, researchers discovered that penicillin taken every day could reduce the frequency and severity of bacterial infections, even in children as young as five months old. The difference this treatment made was so dramatic that the study scheduled for nine months' duration was halted in six.

Bacterial infections are by no means the only complication of sickle cell anemia, but they are the most life-threatening for babies and small children. People with sickle cell anemia have sickle-shaped red blood cells that easily clump together and block small blood vessels, painfully cutting off circulation to parts of the body.

Sickle cell anemia is an inherited blood disease caused by two genes (one from each parent) for abnormal hemoglobin, the protein that carries oxygen in the blood and makes it red.

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Did you know ?

You lose 25% of your body heat through your head and neck if you don't cover them.

You lose heat rapidly through your fingers if you separate them by wearing gloves instead of mittens.

Alcohol makes you feel warm by dilating the capillaries just under your skin — which actually makes you lose body heat faster.

It's not the fibers in your clothes that keep you warm; it's the air heated by your body that gets trapped between those fibers. That's why several layers of clothing keep you warmer than a single layer: even if the thickness is the same, more air is trapped between the layers.

Preventing violence

Anyone not completely out of touch with current events knows that adolescent violence is a growing crisis in many parts of the country, including Massachusetts. In an effort to stop the violence, the Massachusetts Committee on Criminal Justice recently awarded a grant to the Department for the creation of an Office of Violence Prevention (OVP). The new office is directed by Mr. Paul Bracy, who worked on the Boston Violence Prevention Project until coming to DPH. The function of the OVP is to help create violence prevention projects throughout the state, focusing first on cities where levels of adolescent violence are already high.

"Community involvement is key to the success of our program," Bracy said. "That's why Boston, Lawrence and Springfield were chosen to be

continued on next page

the corner office

I am delighted to have the privilege of inaugurating the Annual William A. Hinton Lecture this year to commemorate an outstanding public health leader. Dr. Hinton (1883 - 1959) is best known as the developer of the Hinton test for syphilis. He was also the first director of the Department's Wasserman Laboratory, the first Black American to have a medical textbook published, and the first Black professor at Harvard University.

Hinton had to overcome the racism of his times in order to pursue his professional goals. Despite graduating from Harvard Medical School with honors in 1912, he had trouble getting an internship because he was Black. Once he did find a position, his work was so impressive that by 1915 he had become Chief of Clinical Laboratories at the Boston Dispensary, Director of DPH's Wasserman Laboratory, and an instructor at Harvard.

Hinton's dedication to serving the underprivileged led him to a career-long fight against syphilis that strongly resembles modern efforts to combat AIDS. Poor and Black Americans suffered disproportio-



William A. Hinton, M.D.

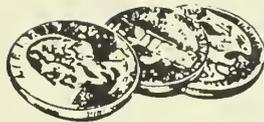
tionately high rates of syphilis early in this century, and the idea that the disease chose its victims by race and moral character was very popular. Hinton, however, recognized that poverty and ignorance were the real risk factors for syphilis. In 1927 he developed a serological test for the disease that was widely used for over 40 years. He also wrote a textbook on syphilis that was published in 1936 and became a standard reference in hospitals and medical schools.

He started one of the country's first schools for laboratory technicians in 1931 and, despite prevailing attitudes, encouraged women to enroll. The Hinton Program was quickly recognized as one of the best in the nation and continues to train students today at Northeastern University.

Hinton believed that a scientist's first duty was service to humanity, not personal celebrity. Each milestone in his career helped to improve the health of poor and Black Americans, but his personal modesty and the racism of the times meant that recognition of his achievements was slow in coming. At Harvard University, he was not promoted to the rank of professor until 1949 — 34 years after he had begun teaching in the medical school. Massachusetts honored the memory of this medical pioneer in 1975 by renaming the serology lab the Dr. William A. Hinton Laboratory.

We can all be inspired by the achievements of this forefather of public health. His persistence and dedication in the face of repeated obstacles sets an example for us all.

Deborah Prothrow-Stith



An easy way to save

Saving money is never easy. Every Thursday you promise yourself you'll get to the bank this week to deposit some of your earnings into an account. Before you know it, the weekend is over and your bank deposit has filled cash registers again.

One way you can save a little (or a lot) each week is through credit union deductions. DPH employees who are paid through Central Office payroll have their choice of two credit unions: State Employees Credit Union or Metropolitan Credit Union. Both offer higher interest rates on savings and lower interest rates on loans than most banks. They also offer regular savings, vacation clubs, Christmas clubs, and checking accounts. However, there are some differences.

State Employees Credit Union is ideally located for state employees who work in downtown Boston and want their money to be easily accessible during work hours. They are located right next to the State House at 152 Bowdoin Street and are open from 8:30 am until 3:00 pm, Monday through Friday. There is no minimum payroll deduction per week, and their loan services are available to individuals who have been state employees for at least nine months and have a minimum balance of \$25 in one of their accounts. Loans are usually processed within 48 hours. An added feature of State Employees Credit Union is that they are now hooked up with the Yankee 24 automatic teller machine service.

Metropolitan Credit Union has several locations, making it ideal for those who like their accounts either close to home or at a distance (so quick trips for "small" withdrawals are more difficult). Metropolitan's main office is in Chelsea, with branches in Winthrop, Lawrence, Burlington, Peabody and Framingham. All offices are open 9:00 am - 5:00 pm, with extended hours until 7:00 pm on Mondays and Thursdays. Metropolitan has a \$5 minimum deduction per week, and offers same-day service on most loan applications, term certificates, money markets, IRAs and the Metropolitan Audio Telephone Teller (MATT). With their MATT system you can bank 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

If you're interested in joining either of these credit unions, please visit the Payroll Office on the 8th floor or the Division of Human Resources on the 2nd floor.

And remember: the \$ you don't see is the \$ you won't miss.



violence (continued)

targeted first. Law enforcement officials, educators and community groups in these three cities have already begun trying to stem the tide of youth violence."

The OVP's immediate tasks include integrating violence prevention into existing DPH programs such as SCIPP (which until now has focused solely on unintentional injuries) and working with other state agencies to offer training in violence prevention as an integral part of their activities. The Office will also serve as an important resource for other groups working on preventing adolescent violence.



lives (continued)

People who inherit one normal and one abnormal hemoglobin gene are said to have sickle cell trait, which does not cause disease. In fact, sickle cell trait is a beneficial adaptation that helps protect people against malaria, an infectious disease that strikes over 100 million victims each year.

Sickle cell trait and sickle cell anemia are found mostly in people of African, Arabic, Mediterranean and Asiatic Indian ancestry — all parts of the world where malaria is endemic. In the U.S., about 1 in 400 Black Americans has sickle cell anemia and about 1 in 12 has sickle cell trait.



Congratulations

Dr. Galen Grayson, a resident at the Shattuck Hospital, has been selected as a Fellow in the Boston Fellow Program sponsored by the Partnership, a nonprofit organization consisting of representatives from local corporations. The program was designed to strengthen the city's ability to recruit and retain minority professionals. Dr. Grayson is one of only four Fellows selected from the medical field.

Success!

During our recent blood drive at the Central Office, the Red Cross recorded 50 donors, which was our goal. (Not bad for flu season!) Thanks to everyone who participated; your support is greatly appreciated by people in need. Special acknowledgements go to the Division of Epidemiology & Toxicology for the most donors from one unit (9 out of 12 staff donated), to Mike Pichon and Paul Coffey of the Office of Emergency Medical Services for having the best time while donating, and to all the first-time donors who were nervous but gave anyway. See you all next drive!

Vital records

Records of all births, deaths and marriages that took place in Massachusetts are available right here in the Central Office basement. The fee for a certified copy from the Registry of Vital Records is \$6.00. If you need a birth record for that trip to the islands this spring, want to trace your family tree or have any questions about vital records, please call Harold Leonard at (617) 727-0110.

Think ahead

The annual open enrollment season begins in April. If you'd like to switch health insurance plans, now is the time to start thinking about what you want. Details on available plans will be out soon.

New locations

The Divisions of Human Resources, Affirmative Action, and Central Services are now located on the 2nd floor of the Central Office. You'll find them alongside the Division of Employee Relations and Joan McDuff, the Assistant Commissioner for Administration. Telephone numbers are as follows:

Assistant-Commissioner Joan McDuff	727-6970
Assistant Heather MacBean	727-2638
Director of Human Resources Marjory Reid	727-2638
Recruiter Lee McDevitt	727-2638
Classifications Anne Wakefield	727-2650
Processing Joan Vericella	727-2650
Director of Employee Relations Dennis Sullivan	727-9570
Director of Affirmative Action Ron Cruz	727-9234
Central Services Bob Brennan	727-2681

Group ski rates

At Wachusett Mountain (just 52 miles from Boston), a group of 20 skiers can enjoy many discounts including reduced rates on lift tickets, rental equipment, and lessons, as well as a free lift ticket for the group's coordinator. For more information, call Wachusett's Group Sales Office at (508) 464-2788.

A night out

If you're tired of hitting the same old haunts every weekend, check out *Mastergate* at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge. *Mastergate* is a political satire inspired by the Iran-Contra affair and written by Larry Gelbart, whose other credits include *M*A*S*H*, *Tootsie*, and *Oh, God*. The play is running now through March 5 and discount tickets are available for subscribers, senior citizens, and groups of ten or more. Call the ART box office at (617) 547-8300 for information on show times, ticket prices, parking and restaurant discounts, and subscriber benefits.

Shattuck happenings

Ten Shattuck Hospital employees are enrolled in an adult diploma program sponsored by the Continuing Education Institute. The program is designed to help employees earn a standard high school diploma, with credit awarded for learning gained through both academics and life experience. Upon completion of the program, employees receive diplomas from Christopher Columbus High School in Boston.

This is the second year for the English as a Second Language Program sponsored by the AFSCME-SEIU Alliance and staffed by Roxbury Community College. This year, Adult Basic Education - Basic Skills has been added for employees who are native or fluent speakers of English.

In both programs, the goals are to strengthen communication through education and to increase opportunities for career advancement.

Calendar

March 1

Deadline to apply for the scholarship competition open to all female high school seniors interested in pursuing Associate in Science degrees in travel and tourism, computer applications, human resources management, executive secretarial, administrative assistant, health services secretarial and other fields. The two-year scholarship is sponsored by Marian Court Junior College in Swampscott. If you have a daughter who is a high school senior, contact Monique Valcour right away at (617) 595-6768. Two scholarships will be awarded and entrants to the competition need not have applied to Marian Court.

March = nutrition

To kick off National Nutrition Month, DPH nutritionists are planning a variety of activities to help you achieve better nutrition through improved eating habits. Here are just a few of the activities scheduled:

March 8 & 22

Stop by the lobby of the Central Office during your lunch hour to visit the Nutrition Booth for information on the best places to eat within a 10-minute walk of 150 Tremont, 20-40 minute shape-up walks around Boston, and a lot more to help you spring into action this season.

March 15 & 29

Have your nutritional status and eating habits evaluated at the Nutrition Awareness Fair, 11 am - 1 pm in the Public Health Council Room. There'll be exhibits, food demonstrations, body fat assessments and much more.

Nutritionists will be available to answer your questions at both the booth and the fair. Join us for the fun and watch your paycheck envelopes for more events.

April 1

Deadline for filing applications for the next Certified Health Officer's exam. If you have an Associate's degree in public health, take note: this is probably the last CHO exam for which you can qualify. The fee is \$105 (\$30 nonrefundable application fee plus \$75 refundable exam fee) and the exam includes both written and oral sections. The application is three pages long and requires supporting documentation, so don't wait until the last minute. For application forms or more information on eligibility, contact the District Health Officer in your region or the Board of Registration of Health Officers in Boston at (617) 727-3069.



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Michael S. Dukakis, Governor
Philip W. Johnston, Human Services Secretary

Deborah Prothrow-Stith, M.D., Commissioner
Pearl K. Russo, Director of Publications

Editor: Caryl A Haddock
Assistant Editor, Inside DPH: Heather MacBean
Layout, Design & Illustration: Ted Polomis
Typesetting: Joanne Gaffey