

Guest Editorial

The Survival Of Black Health Care Providers

By Frank S. Royal, M.D.
President, National Medical Association

Black health care providers and the communities that they serve face hard times ahead. The minority percentage of enrollment in medical schools is declining; predominately black medical schools and hospitals are struggling to keep their doors open. All of this comes at a time when the need for health care has never been so great, particularly in the black community.

The prediction of the Graduate Medical Educational National Advisory Committee (GMENAC) reports that America will have an overabundance of physicians in 1990 is inaccurate as it relates to the minority community. The truth is that those who most desperately need medical care are less likely to get it now than ever before.

In April 1980, there were 375,811 doctors in this country and approximately two per cent (6.516) of them were black. Additional statistics released last year by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), showed that there are 136 doctors to every 100,000 American citizens. However, according to that report, there are only 26 black physicians to every 1,000,000 black citizens in this country. These statistics become more significant when coupled with the fact that a large percentage of the black population is treated exclusively by black physicians. In short, black doctors continue to be the primary source of health care for the minority population (more specifically for black Americans) and there will be no abundance of black doctors at the end of this decade. Quite the contrary, if the recent trend continues, we will have a shortage, not a surplus of black physicians.

Despite relative increases in numbers over the past decade, the Association of American Medical Colleges recently reported that new black enrollment in the nation's 126 medical schools dropped another half of a point last year from 6.6 per cent to 6.2 per cent.

How vividly I recall in 1970 when the Sloan Foundation task force and a number of prestigious medical schools set as their national goal to increase minority enrollment to twelve per cent as reflective of the nation's total minority population. Unfortunately, that goal was never reached, and the statistical trends indicate that the nation's major medical schools have relaxed their commitment. Due to the reliance upon conclusions in the GMENAC report, the nation's larger medical schools may begin reducing the size of their entering classes. As a result, qualified black students may be denied access to a medical education.

Not only have the nation's large medical schools begun to reduce their commitment to black enrollment, but public and private sources have considerably diminished their funding for graduate education. Since 1977, the federal government has stripped the \$83.7 million fund for capitalization to \$7.4 million for universities in financial distress. Special Manpower Initiatives, which contain grants for programs to train physicians and allied health professionals for emergency training and preventive medicine, have been cut from \$19.3 million in fiscal year 1980 to \$9.6 million in fiscal year 1981, and then allowed to rise slightly (due to inflation) to \$13.5 million in fiscal year 1982.

With the drop in the enrollment percentage, and the reductions in funding, qualified black students striving to become physicians will again have to turn to the historically black medical schools. But this time, some may find the doors of the black medical schools closed to them because of financial constraints.

The historically black medical schools have always provided quality education. Seventy-five per cent of all practicing black physicians went to predominately black medical schools. According to the National Advisory Committee on Black Higher Education and Black Colleges and Universities, two of the nation's four historically black medical schools, Meharry Medical College and Howard University, together produced 22 per cent of all black doctors and forty per cent of all black dentists that graduate in 1977.

These facts illustrate the unique service rendered by the handful of historically black medical schools which are now desperately fighting for their financial viability and indeed survival. Take Meharry Medical College for example. In 1977, Meharry Medical School opened the George Russell Tower, a new wing of Hubbard Hospital. The multi-million dollar, 400-bed facility was to become the nerve center for the entire medical school. However, fewer than 150 of the beds are presently occupied and the new wing has never used more than half of its facilities. It is estimated that the Russell Tower is losing approximately one thousand dollars a day because of a paucity of patients. "Our patient population must increase. The financial implications are enormous and an active patient program is essential to a medical school curriculum," said Richard Lester, M.D., president, Meharry Medical School.

Community hospitals throughout the country may also have to adopt creative plans to increase their patient populations in order to continue operation. Over the last ten years, a vast number of inner city hospitals have closed. Philadelphia General Hospital in Philadelphia, and Homer G. Phillips Hospital in St. Louis have both been closed, and the services provided at D.C. General Hospital in Washington, D.C., have been substantially reduced because of severe financial trouble.

In sum, the new age of medical services has placed black health care institutions in a precarious position. They must upgrade their level of out patient care in order to survive. Private practitioners must become more competitive, not because of an "overabundance of physicians," but because of a need to ensure equal participation in both private enterprise and new health care systems. Finally, as America attempts to reorganize the systems of health care delivery, members of the NMA insist that they have the opportunity to participate fully in those evolving health delivery systems and all efforts to provide quality health care to the American people.

Things You Should Know

Scott Bond

1852—

Born in slavery in Mississippi, he went to Madison, Ark. at 21, rented a farm for \$5! His tiny savings from working this farm went to buy a tract of ruined land—his friends laughed, but, later the Rock Island R.R. made a deal for the gravel there... as a result his lot improved, and by 1920 he owned over 4,000 acres! His total holdings valued at \$280,000.

Continental Features

Affirmative Action

The so-called black "neo-conservatives" are riding high nowadays. Walter Williams appears regularly on national television and writes a column for the "Moral Majority Report." Thomas Sowell is feted regularly in the highest circles and is also seen periodically on the boob tube. It is clear that these black backers of Reagan-omics do not have much influence in the black community at large yet it remains important to take them on anyway.

One reason is that certain "comfortable" blacks might decide to hop on what appears to be a bandwagon and throw their weight to Reagan. Take a current look at the once militant black poet Nikki Giovanni. Now laid back in her home town of Cincinnati, this daughter of middle class parents was a blazing firebrand during the 1960's, writing fiery poems about Angela Davis and the like. Presently she is cheering for the murderous program of Reagan-omics.

"The Prez is the only guy we've got," she says. "I like what I see in the Reagan Administration. He's not nearly as mean as Nixon was. And I perceive him to be the type of person who wouldn't ignore the agony of the poor. He's a man you can talk to."

Nikki Giovanni is not the only person playing footsie with Reagan. A certain black journalist who is sponsored by Pepsi-Cola has provided an easy outlet for the neo-conservatives, broadcasting their inane views nationally. Another black scribe, who is sponsored by Greyhound, can be found in the pages of the black press, "blaming the victim" and lashing blacks repeatedly for happening to be poor and discriminated against.

The time has come to take off the gloves and go at it with bare knuckles with these characters; because like a virus that will spread if it is not treated, the fact that powerful forces support these characters' views means that their words will get a wide hearing. Black unity must be valued but the question is: at what price? Does unity mean that if your black neighbor is setting fire to your house, you don't try to stop him?

Taking on the black neo-conservatives is critical at this stage also because they have made a fetish out of assailing black leadership — the NAACP, Urban League, the black mayors, and others. Their machine-gun like attacks have caused a certain backsliding on the part of some leaders, which not only calls for assailing the neo-conservatives — but for better or worse it also calls for making certain pointed criticisms about certain black leaders — criticism that should come not from the right but from the other side of the barricades.

This by necessity is a delicate process. In the face of a cruel offensive by the Reaganists, it is all important to construct

the broadest front possible in opposition. Sniping at potential allies is not necessarily the wisest path.

But the question is: are we talking about allies? Reagan campaigned in 1980 in the black community, not so much because he was interested in getting our ballots but because he knew that it would soften his image amongst the all-important white liberal voters.

Similarly, when phony elections were held in Zimbabwe that propelled the puppet Bishop Abel Muzorewa into prominence against Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo's Patriotic Front, it was Bayard Rustin — old line black "leader" — who was trotted out to testify as to how a "free and fair" vote took place.

Today headlines are blaring about a new study on South Africa commissioned by the Rockefeller Foundation to the tune of \$2.065 million, assisted by business leaders from Xerox and Cummins Engine and advised by the likes of Henry Kissinger and Cyrus Vance. Their massive study entitled ominously *Time Is Running Out* does take a position contrary to that of the primary South African liberation movement, the fabled African National Congress (ANC); i.e., they do not call for an immediate withdrawal of the U.S. corporate vultures who set up shop in South Africa and profit handsomely because of low wages paid, after shutting down shop right here.

The black masses of South Africa have spoken and they demand disinvestment of U.S. corporate wealth. Yet, it was inevitable that there would be a number of blacks on the Rockefeller Foundation Commission who back their dastardly proposals down the line. Chairing the group were the blacks, e.g. Prof. Charles V. Hamilton and Dr. Constance Hilliard, also affixed their signatures to this document drenched in blood.

In other words, the U.S. Establishment is saying in effect, "How can you say our plans for South Africa are racist, when Afro-Americans support it?" But we need to strip away this convenient shield and if it involves pulling the coat or rapping the knuckles of black leaders here, then so be it.

For Detroit shows what happens when critical voices from this side of the barricades are not raised insistently. With the aid backing of Mayor Coleman Young, recently awarded the NAACP's highest honor — the Spingarn Medal — a measure was passed that hikes the city income tax and will worsen the standard of living of all poor and working people, including blacks. A wage freeze for city workers is in store. For these reasons and others, the Metropolitan Detroit AFL-CIO, the local American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFCSE) and a number of top

What Price Black Unity

Gerald C. Horne, Esquire

black trade unionists came out adamantly against Mayor Young's proposals.

Many recognized that the Mayor's reluctance to take on the banks, the utilities and the big bosses who have the money to fund city services but are hoarding it. Instead, the mayor has decided to put the weight on the backs of the poor. This curious approach from a one-time leftist leader has allowed the racists to stake out progressive ground in defense of the interests of the poor! The same thing happened in Cleveland with black City Council President George Forbes.

This is why it is so important to run the risk of angering certain black leaders. Members of the AFSCME local, many of whom are black, are staring in the face of a two-year wage freeze, and with food prices going up, housing costs going up, clothing costs going up, etc., this is no joking matter.

These realizations have dawned on others. For example, Dr. Carlton Goodlett, noted black publisher, physician and Renaissance Man, has sent a scorching letter to 45 black corporate directors, denouncing those who serve on corporation boards but "betray the black masses and the black press" by providing "no direct assistance overt or covert to the cities or to the black struggle for black survival. . . ." He pointed out that "many black ambassadors to Corporate America mistakenly believe that their 'merit' and not the struggle got them where they are today. Marching feet of the Civil Rights struggle of the '60's and the black press literally forced corporate America to respond appropriately with black appointments."

As he so often is, Dr. Goodlett is right on this one. During the 1960's the idea of a multi-class front, i.e., blacks united irrespective of class to fight Jim Crow and its outgrowths, was the primary resonance in the black community. The baby should not be thrown out with the bath water; that is, just because certain black elements are off the beam from time to time, does not mean at all that a declaration of war should be issued against them. Yet, the fact is that perhaps the time has come to begin thinking not only about the quantity of black representation but also the quality. If we are not concerned about the latter, then the former will inevitably suffer. If we do not subject certain of our black leaders to searching scrutiny, then we leave them prey to the cruel clutches and influence of the notorious "black neo-conservatives" and their mentors. If we don't fire up some of our black leaders behind closed doors and in the black press, then we shouldn't be surprised when they begin drifting inexorably to the right. At the same time, our primary focus should always be on those big boys who run Washington and Wall Street and who pull the strings, even though they can't be seen.

A View From Capitol Hill:

Growing Disregard of Needs and Rights Of Blacks

By Gus Savage
Member of Congress

The U.S. House of Representatives last week adopted 238 to 195 the tax cuts proposed by President Reagan.

In the next three years this will save America's wealthiest individuals \$223 billion and biggest business \$65 billion. What is wrong with this is that only last month Congress approved the Administration's proposal to reduce the Federal budget by \$35 billion mainly in social service programs.

Because the Reagan tax proposal could never meet the standards of equity and fairness that a tax reform package should, the Democrats ought to have assumed the responsibility of proposing one that would. Instead, the Democratic leadership proposed a tax plan that also represented a dramatic shift in the tax burden from capital to labor.

The plan made it seem that while Republicans are the party of the multi-millionaires, the Democrats are merely the party of the millionaires — and that neither truly represents the masses!

For instance, under the Democrat's plan, large corporations would have been able to write-off the entire cost of a Mercedes-Benz in one year, while millions of old and poor people cannot even afford bus fare. Also this proposal would have reduced estate taxes to the extent that more than half of all estates would pay no tax at all.

Even worse, under the Republican tax cut plan, a family of four with \$20,000 a year income would save only \$180 less income tax next year and a total of \$1,100 during the next three years, while a family with \$100,000 annual income would save \$1,700 in income tax next year and \$18,000 during the next three years.

If we are asking the needy to do without by specifically asking our senior citizens to give up the \$122 a month minimum they depend on to live — and asking the hungry to go without food stamps — and asking the unemployed to forget about supplemental unemployment compensation — and asking students to make it without college tuition loans and grants — and asking children to attend public schools without lunch — how can we rationalize using the savings to fund a welfare plan for the greedy?

I maintain that the Government should not be more concerned about profits than

about people.

If the Republicans are as hard as uncooked beans in pushing for the wishes of the greedy, too many of my Democratic colleagues are as soft as jelly in defense of the needy! The 238 votes for Reagan's tax cuts included 48 Democrats.

I personally pleaded with the House Rules Committee to bring to the floor for debate a substitute tax proposal in the true interest of the middle-class and working poor, proposed by Congressman John Conyers (D-Mich.) and backed by the majority of the Congressional Black Caucus.

We were denied by the vote of whites on that powerful Committee, Democrats and Republicans alike. Its only black member, Shirley Chisholm (D-N.Y.), of course, was vocally on our side.

Then, I asked the Democratic leadership to permit one of us, during the Democrat's time in general debate of the tax issue on the floor last Wednesday, to state the majority view of the 18 black Members of Congress, all Democrats, on this issue. I was turned down as naturally we were also refused by the leadership of the Jilly white Republican Members of Congress.

Incidentally, the so-called white liberal leadership of the Democratic Study Group was no more considerate of us.

In other words, blacks as a group were not allowed to amend or even discuss on the floor either the Democrat or Republican tax cut proposal.

We should be enraged that blacks are still ignored by the Republicans and taken for granted by the liberals and the Democrats, even though we are the most liberal of Americans and the most loyal of Democrats.

Still, it would not have mattered whether the Democrat or Republican tax proposal passed, because there was not a dime's (due to inflation, I mean a dollar's) worth of difference between the two. In fact, during last Wednesday's House debate the Speaker boasted of the number of Republicans who participated in writing the Democratic tax proposal.

We Democrats keep losing to Reagan precisely because the Republicans have programs, proposals, and somewhat of a philosophy, while the Democratic leadership merely seeks to modify Republicans' tenets of reaction and racism and thereby sanctions

them.

That is why the Republicans are more united and that is why Carter lost. The American people will always prefer the real thing to any facsimile.

Finally, I may as well admit that the leadership of my Black Caucus was derelict and divided or deceived on these tax-cut proposals, and must accept some of the blame for our frustration in this matter and the general impotence of blacks as a group in this Congress.

But I assure you that we — Congressman John Conyers, Ron Dellums, and I — will continue with renewed determination to secure for blacks in Congress the respect of the House's leadership at least equal to that accorded the Women's Caucus, and the "Boll Weevils" and "Gypsy Moths".

We rededicate ourselves to this because our plight in this House reflects the growing disregard of the needs and rights of all black Americans by the increasingly reactionary rulers of America.

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If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who propose to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean's majestic waves without the awful roar of its waters. —Frederick Douglass