

Community News B1

Diabetes becoming major health concern for blacks

By ROBIN BARKSDALE
Community News Editor

It's the third leading cause of death among Afro-Americans, and many are walking around with a disease they don't even know they have.

Diabetes is a little talked about affliction, but it is an illness that rapidly is increasing among the Afro-American population.

"The rate of diabetes among blacks has grown dramatically in the last 10 years or so," said Cindy Heilig, director of the regional office of the American Diabetes Association based in Greensboro. "Probably one half of those adults don't know they have diabetes."

Diabetes is a disease which prevents the pancreas from producing enough insulin to metabolize or "burn up" all the sugar and starches in a person's body. The disease is usually more easily detected in children because they are more inclined to suffer from type I diabetes, which makes them insulin-dependent. Most Afro-Americans suffer from type II, non-insulin dependent diabetes, which usually shows up in adulthood.

The fact that diabetes strikes Afro-American adults more frequently than Afro-American children makes it more difficult to detect in the early stages.

"The adult onset sort of diabetes will rarely be serious enough at first to attract much attention," said Dr. Marc Browning, a member of the pediatrics department at Bowman Gray School of Medicine. "They won't notice much until it gets more complicated."

More than 90 percent of Afro-Americans with diabetes suffer from the type II non-insulin sort. And although insulin-dependent diabetes does occur in Afro-Americans, it appears at a lower rate than in the white population. Afro-Americans with either type of diabetes are especially susceptible to complications affecting the kidneys, nerves and eyes. Afro-Americans with type II diabetes also are at special risk of hardening of the arteries, which can lead to heart attacks or strokes.

Dr. Browning said that researchers and doctors still are searching for clues as to why there has been such a dramatic climb in the number of Afro-Americans with diabetes. Before 1940, there was little research available on the prevalence of diabetes within the minority community, particularly among Afro-Americans. During the 1960s, studies indicated that the rate of diabetes among Afro-Americans and whites in the United States was similar. But by 1975, the occurrence rate among Afro-Americans

pulled ahead of the white population and has climbed steadily ever since. In 1987, the North Carolina affiliate of the ADA formed the Minority Development Committee, a task force established to specifically monitor diabetes among the state's minority populations and to implement awareness programs to address the problem.

"The committee was formed to address the concerns of all minority people in North Carolina and especially black people in relation to diabetes," said Ms. Heilig, who also is the director of the committee. "We want to raise awareness and address this problem."

Ms. Heilig said that the most recent studies suggest that heredity and environmental habits affect the Afro-American most strongly with respect to contracting diabetes. But she said that genetics and environmental influence is a complicated mixture.

THE FACTS

- Diabetes is the third leading cause of death among Afro-Americans.
- Afro-Americans between the ages of 45 and 65 have twice as much diabetes as do whites in the same age group
- Over the age of 65, Afro-Americans have nearly three times as much diabetes as whites.
- One in four Afro-American women older than 55 has diabetes -- double the rate of white women.
- Afro-Americans with diabetes experience higher rates of complications such as blindness, amputation and end-stage renal disease.

Physicians have determined that diet, exercise and stress are important environmental factors with respect to diabetes. Dr. Browning said that dietary habits have very serious bearings on diabetes and the control of the illness. Afro-Americans who have diets high in fats and simple sugars are at a greater risk of obesity, and obesity has been closely linked with diabetes.

Both Ms. Heilig and Dr. Browning said that many older Afro-Americans live with diabetes for years before they even are aware that they have

it. Dr. Browning said that in adults, the symptoms of diabetes may be mistaken for some other ailment and not immediately taken care of or investigated. That delay, he said, could have devastating effects.

"It needs to be treated. In the long-term it could be very detrimental," said Dr. Browning. "A significant number of diabetes patients will develop the problems with eyes, kidneys and nerves that make diabetes a very important medical concern."

Randy Henning, the president of the Forsyth County chapter of the ADA, said that diabetes has not been as popular a disease as cancer or heart disease. That fact, he said, has created many misconceptions about diabetes and has resulted in a lack of awareness about the illness.

"Diabetes is a complicated disease," he said. "It deals with insulin, what you eat, your physical activity and your psychology."

Mr. Henning said that he knew nothing about the illness until his son was diagnosed as being a diabetic. His son, who now is 8, takes at least two insulin shots each day and has his finger pricked about four times daily in order to perform blood checks.

"You learn about diabetes real quick, especially with a son," said Mr. Henning. "It's a very disciplined disease. If you don't have discipline, you can have a lot of problems. Most people have the general misconception that it's controlled by insulin injection and that's it. There's more to it than that. Diabetes is a disease you have to live with. It's a way of life."

Dr. Browning said that the treatment of type II diabetes includes an attempt to change dietary habits. Foods high in sugar and fat are replaced with lean meats and fresh fruits and vegetables. People that are overweight are encouraged to lose weight.

Mr. Henning said that few if any Afro-Americans have been involved with the local chapter. He admits that part of that problem may be due to the fact that the local chapter, in the past, has been perceived as an elitist group. Whatever the reasons, he said, he wants to encourage all diabetes patients to become involved with the chapter.

"I understand from some other people that the chapter had been thought of as an upper-crust, kind of 'Buena Vista organization' because of where it meets (at First Christian Church on Country Club Road). I don't live anywhere near Buena Vista," he said. "I want to get everyone involved with this chapter. I don't care who they are. We want them in this group."

November has been declared National Diabetes Month and the state affiliate is sponsoring a daylong seminar Nov. 18 in Raleigh. The theme is "Education Through Sharing." Ms. Heilig said that she has been hoping that a minority diabetes patient will take the initiative to form a branch of the minority task force in Winston-Salem.

"I'd like to develop a committee in Winston-Salem," she said. "I need someone to take the initiative. It basically just involves contacting me and getting the process started. I'd love for there to be a committee in Winston-Salem to address this problem."

For more information on the ADA, diabetes in general or the Minority Development Committee, contact Ms. Heilig at 1-800-662-9692 or call Debbie Harris in Raleigh at 870-1885.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THURSDAY, NOV. 16

- A talk titled, "A Relationship Worth Fighting For," about communication in marriage when anger is present, will be held at 7:30 p.m. at the activity building of Highland Presbyterian Church. The program is co-sponsored by the Mental Health Association and the Association of Couples for Marriage Enrichment. The program is free and open to the public.
- The General Employment Division of the Winston-Salem Urban League, in cooperation with the main library, will sponsor an employability skills workshop from 6 to 9 p.m. The purpose of the workshop is to provide job search techniques in the areas of proper application completion, interviewing skills and resume writing. Admission is free. For more information call the league at 725-3614 or the library at 727-2254.
- The Forsyth County Juvenile Justice Council Inc. will hold its regular meeting from noon to 1:30 p.m. at St. Paul's Episcopal Church's assembly room. The topic will be family-based services, empowering families. Local experts and participants of the Empowering Families Conference will be featured.
- Paul Zindel's award-winning play titled "The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Metrigoids," will be presented through Nov. 18 by the Salem College Players. Performances will be at 8 p.m. in the drama workshop of the Salem Fine Arts Center. Admission is \$1. The play is about a mother and her two teen-age daughters.

FRIDAY, NOV. 17

- Winston-Salem State University is sponsoring a health fair from 3 to 6 p.m. for students in the elementary through high school grades in conjunction with the second annual "Bighouse" Gaines Basketball Classic at the Lawrence Joel Memorial Coliseum in Winston-Salem. Students participating in the health fair will receive a free ticket to the games, held from 7 to 9 p.m.
- The Winston-Salem Crafts Guild will hold its 18th annual holiday show through Nov. 19 at the convention center. For more information call 724-0307.
- Miss America 1988, Kaye Lani Rae Rafko, will speak at Forsyth Memorial Hospital at 4 p.m. in honor of the dedication of the Women's Center at the hospital. Miss Rafko will share her experiences during her reign as Miss America and her commitment to the nursing profession. The center is scheduled to be completed in 1991.

SATURDAY, NOV. 18

- Alpha Mu Sigma Chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority will hold its annual Founders' Day banquet in the Red Room at Winston-Salem.

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'Dare to Be Different' theme earns teen spot in contest finals

By ROBIN BARKSDALE
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Tamarian McIntyre loves to talk about "Daring to Be Different," and her candid discussion of avoiding the path to drug addiction has earned her a place in the finals of a statewide oratorical contest.

The competition is sponsored annually by housing authorities in cities across the state. Tamarian, a 13-year-old student at Cook Middle School, is among six finalists that will present their anti-drug essays at the state housing authority conference on crime prevention in Raleigh this weekend. The semi-final competition was held at Winston-Salem's Happy Hill Garden Community Center two weeks ago.

Tamarian said she selected the "Dare to Be Different" theme for her essay because she has seen many of her friends lose the fight against peer pressure to join the crowd and take drugs.

"That was just the first thing that came to my mind," said Tamarian, who competed against 12 other students from across North Carolina and one student from South Carolina. "You don't have to follow the crowd. There is peer pressure but you don't have to go along with it. A lot of kids do, though. I just wanted to say that there is something different to do and that there is nothing wrong with being different. When friends try to force you to do something, you shouldn't do it."

Growing up in an area surrounded by drug users is not easy, Tamarian said. She said, too, that such circumstances don't mean that



Photo by Mike Cunningham

Tamarian McIntyre will represent Winston-Salem during the oratorical contest portion of the state housing authority's conference on crime prevention. Ms. McIntyre focused her anti-drug essay on the theme, "Dare to Be Different."

it's okay for children to do what they see older people doing. In her address at the semi-final competition, she told the youth in the audience that living in a public housing facility does not make them bad people or people who have to turn to drugs. She described drug use as "a short road to a quick end" and said that "my choice not to use drugs is my gift to God." The challenge, she told them, is to know that they can make something of themselves despite the things that they see as they grow up.

"To me, it's hard. Not being with the crowd isn't easy because you feel left out and different," said Tamarian. "But if you really want to be drug-free, you have to stay away from friends that use drugs."

Tamarian said that she has seen friends get hooked on drugs, and she is proud that she has not followed their lead. She said that her mother has had the biggest impact on her decision to stay drug-free.

"I haven't turned to drugs because of my mother," she said. "She always told me about not doing drugs."

Her mother, Wanda, hardly could keep still as her daughter delivered her speech at the Happy Hill Center. She quietly repeated every word with Tamarian, hanging nervously on the edge of her seat until she had completed the poem that she wrote to wrap up her essay.

"I was probably more nervous

than she was. People kept telling me to be still," said Ms. McIntyre. "I was just so nervous for her, but I was very proud of her, too. She put a lot of effort into her speech. We live in a community where we see so much of this (drug abuse). It hasn't happened to her but it has happened to a lot of other kids."

Lucille Ransby, crime prevention coordinator for the City of Winston-Salem Housing Authority said that the purpose of the oratorical contest is to get young residents of public housing facilities involved in meaningful activities and to expose them to a variety of experiences.

"I contend that involvement is the key," she said. "They'll be traveling to other areas to participate. They get exposure in the city and then they go on to other cities. In the past, we had a different format, but three years ago, we decided to move into the educational arena with an oratorical contest. This helps the children learn to speak well and to speak in front of groups."

Bettye F. Jackson, housing management specialist for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, said that the young people participating in the contest represented youth who have made conscious decisions not to lose their life to drugs and crime.

"They have made choices to be here instead of somewhere getting high or committing a crime," she said. "We are all here because we have made a choice to support them in their choice."

Winston-Salem's Best Choice Center schedules special program featuring local elected officials in commemoration of first anniversary

The Best Choice Center Inc., a substance abuse and referral center located at 1525 E. 14th St., will celebrate its first anniversary Sunday, Nov. 19, at 2 p.m. at the center.

The event will feature an open forum and will include guests

Martha Wood, mayor-elect; George Sweat, chief of the Winston-Salem Police Department; and Warren Sparrow, district attorney for Forsyth County. Other elected officials also are expected to participate.

Programs sponsored through

the Best Choice Center include the ComPac program, a program that provides tutoring and special educational programs for youngsters.

The center previously has sponsored support groups such as Cocaine Anonymous and Alco-

holics Anonymous. In October, Anita Dunston, the center's executive director, participated in a statewide conference on the prevention of drug and

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