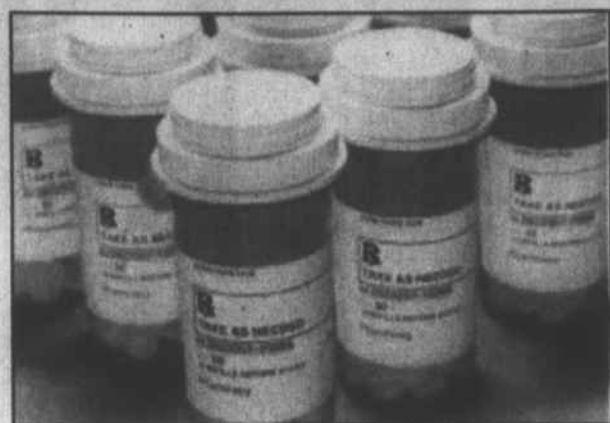


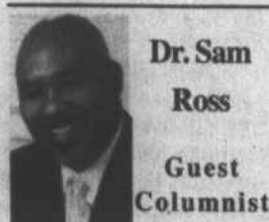
FORUM

Drug discount helping African-Americans is at risk



“On average, safety-net hospitals care for more than twice as many African-American patients as other providers.”

—Dr. Sam Ross



Dr. Sam Ross
Guest Columnist

It is well established that low-income African-Americans tend to be sicker when they arrive at the emergency room. It's the mission of safety-net providers to treat them (and all patients) regardless of ability to pay. Unfortunately, the drug industry is working hard in Washington to make that much more difficult.

At issue is a little known but enormously important federal statute called the 340B drug discount program. Hundreds of thousands of poor urban and rural African-Americans benefit daily from the program as it helps make free and slid-

ing-scale medications and healthcare services possible. As an African-American physician and CEO of an inner-city hospital system, I see the profound good it does every day.

Congress created the 340B program in 1992 to allow nonprofit and public healthcare providers that serve large numbers of low-income and/or rural patients to receive discounted medications from drug companies. In turn, these safety-net providers supply low-cost or no-cost medicines to the community on an outpatient basis. The program also helps fund clinics, improved pharmacy services, medication education and patient travel to the hospital.

The pharmaceutical industry appears to deeply dislike the program and has spent the last couple of years doing everything

possible to dismantle it in Congress. Even at a time of stratospheric prescription prices, drug companies want to gut 340B to recoup an estimated \$4.5 billion in discounts each year. To give you some perspective, that's about 1 percent of the annual U.S. retail pharmaceutical market.

On average, safety-net hospitals care for more than twice as many African-American patients as other providers. Public hospitals serve on average nearly 30 percent African-American patients. As a whole, hospitals in the 340B program deliver \$25 billion per year in uncompensated care.

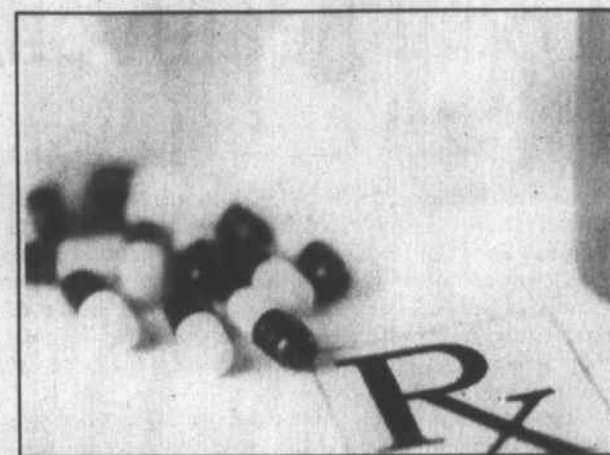
Shrinking 340B would be disastrous for African-American communities across the country. Cutbacks would immediately impact the availability of free and low-cost medicines as well as clinics that cater to key health

inequities facing African-American patients: HIV/AIDS, diabetes, hypertension and cancer. For many rural hospitals which run on tight margins, the loss of 340B savings could force them to shut down altogether.

It's important to understand that the program is not funded by taxpayers. Instead, it's paid for indirectly by the drug industry that can well afford it. I urge readers to contact their members of Congress and tell them to protect the 340B drug discount program.

It's essential to the well-being of low-income African-Americans in towns and cities across the country — and to the fabric of America's healthcare safety net.

Samuel Ross, MD is CEO of Bon Secours Baltimore Health System in Baltimore, MD.



African-American boys can be saved when we use the entire village



James B. Ewers Jr.
Guest Columnist

African-American boys in America are facing an uphill battle when it comes to success. Traditional institutions and age-old strategies are being stretched in order to find solutions to stop this downward trend of hopelessness and despair.

Why have we found ourselves in this place? What got us here? Opinions come from all walks of life. Many of us would suggest that the lack of a stable family structure has a great bearing on where we are today. Everyone that I knew as a child had a strong home environment. For example, while our fathers weren't perfect, they did provide us with the basic necessities such as food, clothing, shelter and guidance. I believe many of my generation took these things for granted in our community.

Just as important was the fact that there were also grandfathers, uncles, and

cousins who stepped in and served as father figures. So these black men were always around, telling us that we could be something in life.

Our entire neighborhood took an interest in our development. Coming home from school, I can remember being asked how my day was and if I had homework. I both admired and feared the men in my neighborhood. We all knew that if we stepped out of line that we would be kicked back into line by our elders. It was useless to say anything to our fathers, grandfathers or other male role models because they wouldn't side with us as kids. There was an unwritten rule in black neighborhoods that the men there would take care of us and make sure that we were OK.

Respect was the password in our neighborhoods long before Aretha Franklin sang the song "Respect." Saying "yes sir" and taking your hat off when you entered someone's house or entered a building was just the way it was. There weren't any questions asked or reasons given for this behavior. Baby boomers, like me, still say "yes sir" and still

take our hats off when we enter someone's home or enter a building. Good manners had no bearing on your parent's education or status in the community. What was at play here was instilling in us as black boys a set of rules and regulations that we still carry with us today.

Spirituality was extremely important in black neighborhoods. There was never a question about going to Sunday school and then staying for church and then going back for evening service. Saturday or Sunday was church and that was the way it was. And when we went to school, we stayed for the entire day until school was out. Who ever heard of getting kicked out of school for fighting or some other ridiculous act. As black boys, we took school seriously as we knew in the end that it would help us. It helped also that we had teachers who cared about us and believed that we could achieve.

Now as we are well into another year, the state and welfare of black boys continues to be in peril. While there are some pockets of excellence, there are too many valleys of

despair. A culture of hopelessness and no goals has young black boys in its clutches. Time-honored phrases like "yes sir" and thank you have been replaced by "what's up" and "whatever." Boyish looks and charm have been replaced by acting and looking too old too soon. High expectations, have soured into low or no ideals. The concept of "It takes a village to raise a child" has turned into "Make it the best way that you can." Instead of lifting up and celebrating black men of prominence, black boys now turn to sports stars and music stars. Ask a young African-American male today to identify the latest sneakers and they will give you an immediate response. Ask them to identify two Civil Rights heroes besides Dr. King and they will be hard pressed. There is something drastically wrong with this picture.

Having pride in one's appearance has gone to wearing clothes that are two, sometimes three, sizes too big for them. While this is the social malaise black boys find themselves in, we cannot allow this to be the future. It is my strong feeling that African-

Americans have too much history to simply give into this period of despair.

Teddy Pendergrass sang in one of his many hits, "Wake up everybody, no more sleeping in bed, no more backward thinking, time for thinking ahead." Individuals and groups, both black and white, must decide to be an elixir for this problem. Any person can mentor a child. It only takes a willingness to serve. Teachers, counselors, coaches and administrators must take up the mantle of hope and design programs for black boys at an early age.

Mentoring groups around that must re-double their efforts to save black boys from themselves. Places of worship must redirect their efforts toward strengthening black boys and the family structure. For example, instead of adopting a family for a particular holiday, adopt the family for the entire year. I think the higher calling and more difficult calling is to adopt a family over a period of time.

While partnering activities are on the rise, there ought to be more of them. Schools, cities, social service agencies and places of worship all have the ability

to form alliances with each other. Businesses can also play a major role by sponsoring programs and events. Our communities grow stronger when all of its parts are viable and valued.

So, watching a generation of African-American boys disappear before our eyes is not an option. Talking about the problem while admirable will not stop the decline. It is the "doing of the talking" that matters.

Turning our backs on it and pretending that it doesn't exist won't work either. And lastly, because our families don't have problems, doesn't mean that we can't help as it may not be us today but it may be us tomorrow.

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Clock

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made history by becoming the first African American president in the history of the country.

Inheritance of bigotry

The racism exhibited by Trump against Barack Obama, was a learned mindset inherited from his father years earlier.

When a black woman asked to rent an apartment in a Brooklyn complex managed by Donald Trump's real estate company, she said she was told that nothing was available. A short time later, a white woman who made the same request was

invited to choose between two available apartments. The two would-be renters on that July 1972 day were actually undercover "testers" for a government-sanctioned investigation to determine whether Trump Management Inc. discriminated against minorities seeking housing at properties across Brooklyn and Queens. Federal investigators also gathered evidence. Trump employees had secretly marked the applications of minorities with codes, such as "No. 9" and "C" for "colored," according to government interview accounts filed in federal court. The employees allegedly directed blacks and Puerto Ricans away from buildings with

mostly white tenants, and steered them toward properties that had many minorities, the government filings alleged. In October 1973, the Justice Department filed a civil rights case that accused the Trump firm, whose complexes contained 14,000 apartments, of violating the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

Trump began his presidential primary campaign by insulting and name calling each and every Republican candidate in the race. The bullying, ridicule, profanity, and rhetoric were something no aspiring presidential candidate had experienced before.

Next was the attack on women. Then the

attack on Mexicans, Black Lives Matter, Muslims, the urging of violence against protesters, and his latest, attack on a federal judge.

Americans who support these negative qualities in a presidential candidate are inviting disaster to the United States, themselves, their families and to future generations. He captured the imagination of his supporters with showmanship and fear. He has painted blacks, Mexicans, and Muslims as the scourge of the earth.

These United States of America belongs to its diverse millions of citizens. Trump, who is of European (German) decent, feels that the country belongs to and

should be controlled by the likes of him. He can never be representative of anyone except those people who he believes are of the same ethnic heritage as he. He cannot be president in the interest of African Americans, Latinos, Mexicans, Muslims, or anyone else who disagrees with him.

His latest attacks on the federal judge who is presiding over his "Trump University" case points up his disregard for anyone who does not do his bidding and challenges his bullying ego.

Trump the "Bully"

The bully's ego is artifice. His arrogance is a hollow confidence. His condescension is a need

to belittle. His rage is a need to control. This ego for him is a fragile thing, driven by fear and narcissism, not by power, nor by the power he wishes so desperately to possess. In fact, the bully is actually quite powerless, for he is only as powerful as the power we give him. He feeds on our fear, but his hunger is driven solely by his own.

As was the case with Barry Goldwater, let the decent people of these United States speak out against this bully at the ballot box and hand him the resounding defeat he deserves.

From the New York Beacon