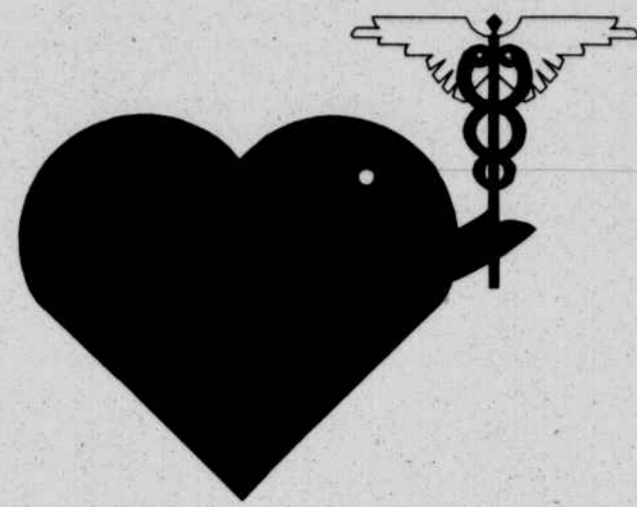


Health & Wellness

Issues concerning the wellbeing of the African-American community



By AVONIE BROWN
An NNPA Correspondent

WHHEATON, Md. — Andrew Greene beams with the pride of a father who delights in the accomplishments of his children. There is no hesitation in his voice as he declares how blessed and thankful he is to have them in his life.

On the surface Clinton, 17, and Melinda, 15, are typical teenagers — preoccupied with music, sports, television, the computer and the telephone. On this afternoon they are oblivious to their father's praises and are much more concerned with rummaging through kitchen cupboards in search of after-school snacks.

But the situation is anything but typical in the Greene household. In late spring 1996, Melinda began complaining that she couldn't sleep properly. "I attributed that to the fact that she was young, active, energetic, involved in all kinds of activities with her friends," Mr. Greene explained. "I thought she was plain tired, so I didn't give it much weight." He remained unconcerned until he received a call from her school that there was a medical emergency.

THE FAMILY'S MEDICAL odyssey took them to Children's Hospital in Washington, D.C. Four days after admission, Melinda suffered a stroke, losing much of the functioning of her right side. By June 1996 she was diagnosed with dilated cardiomyopathy. That is, the left side of her heart (ventricle and atrium) is dilated more than it should be, with the heart enlarged, and the walls are thinner than they should be.

Dr. Eric Quivers, transplant cardiologist at Children's Hospital, said Melinda's situation is idio-

pathic in that they do not know the cause. "Transplant is the best option. You can choose not to do anything or you can choose to treat it medically, but the heart typically will continue to deteriorate," he explained. "But individuals typically die within two years; however, there is an 80 percent survival rate five years after surgery."

She was transferred to the Kennedy Krieger Institute in Baltimore, where she spent six weeks rehabilitating her right side. On the day of her scheduled discharge, she suffered a cardiac arrest and her heart stopped for 12 minutes. Doctors were able to revive Melinda, but the stroke and the cardiac arrest did some damage. She suffers short-term memory loss, her speech is slightly slurred, she does not have use of her right hand and she has a limp because of the drag of her right leg.

"This child is tough beyond belief," said her father with obvious emotion. But that does not begin to describe Melinda. By October, with an auto implantable cardioverter/defibrillator (an electrical device used to restore normal heartbeat by applying a brief electric shock) placed in her heart, she was back in school, had learned to write with her left hand and was making the honor roll.

"Melinda possesses a personal strength and focus that is unexpected from someone so young," said Greene. Even though the heart of a 70-year-old faintly beats inside this 15-year-old, she has not allowed it to stop her. She is extremely self-sufficient, he father explains. She fixes her own meals, takes showers by herself, dresses herself, cleans her room and will readily refuse help from her father and brother.

But Melinda is still a child and the situation has also taken its physical and emotional toll on her. "I'm scared," she said with a nervous laugh. "It's hard to see my family going through this," she continued after an intensely emotional and pregnant pause.

GREENE SAYS THE MOST difficult thing he has to deal with now is the persistent fear that sometimes overwhelms him. "My hope is that I get rid of the fear. If the fear of her heart failing can be removed, then that's enough for me. Just so that I know that my child can get up every day and perform her tasks and her heart doesn't just fail her. A new

heart I hope will remove that fear," he said.

Melinda is one of three children awaiting heart transplants at Children's Hospital, and all are African-American. The typical wait is approximately one year. "We are fighting the perception that organs are being taken from minorities and given to whites," said Quivers. "But the patient's status and length of time on the waiting list determine who gets the offer."

Until recently a new heart seemed like a remote possibility as the cost of health care and lifestyle changes have overwhelmed this single parent (Melinda's mother died six years ago from unrelated heart complications). Last year Melinda's bills were over \$675,000 and most of that was paid by Greene's insurance. However, the heart transplant that Melinda requires could cost as little as \$175,000 or over \$550,000, depending on her health status at the time of the operation. And that is only the beginning. After the transplant, cardiologists have informed Greene that Melinda can expect to be on medication for the rest of her life (over \$5,000 per year) and most of this will be out-of-pocket expenses.

THE BLEAKNESS OF THE SITUATION changed with one visit to the beauty salon. Hairstylist Pearl Greene, Andrew Greene's ex-wife and Melinda's step-mother, was exchanging general chit-chat with a client when the conversation turned to Melinda's situation. Unknown to Pearl was the fact that seated in her chair was Judith Thomas, the co-director of the Larry King Cardiac Foundation (LKCF). Thomas informed her of the work of LKCF, helping people who are unable to pay for heart surgery and follow-up care, and told her to have Greene call her at the foundation.

Greene followed through, and Thomas invited him to submit a letter detailing the family's medical and financial circumstance as the foundation was getting ready to choose their next grant recipient. All candidates were evaluated, and after meeting with Melinda's doctors and on Thomas' recommendation, the foundation choose Melinda as its first pediatric grant recipient.

With one phone call, Larry King brought renewed hope to a family in need. "I was at work when the call came through and the voice said, 'Mr. Greene, this is

Larry King, and it's a done deal! You don't have to worry about the operation for your daughter, the transplant is covered, you don't have to worry about it." The recollection was enough to make Greene choke up with emotion. "The tears just started running down my face. Never did I think in my dire need that someone would just reach out and help me like he has. He is a man who has everything, yet he's taken the time to pause and see that there are people he can help in a meaningful way."

"It was a great moment in my life when I was able to call Mr. Greene and tell him that Melinda had been chosen to get the funding for the heart," said King, as he made his way through the reception of the glitzy black-tie fundraising gala for LKCF. "There is nothing better than doing things for people, and she (Melinda) is a doll. She was an easy choice, she is young and she is bright. Let's hope we get her a heart, and frankly I know we will."

THE NOV. 19, 1997, gala featured performances by singer Michael Bolton and comedian Sinbad as well as an emotional tribute to Melinda by singer Bob Carlisle. The event, which brought out much of Washington, D.C.'s power brokers, raised more than \$200,000. Additional funding for the foundation comes from private donations and from King. Ten years after undergoing quintuple bypass surgery, King has turned over substantial proceeds from his books and speaking engagements to the foundation.

Greene admits that he does get very depressed at times when he looks at his beautiful daughter and realizes that there are no guarantees. But her illness has had some positive impact, it has made him very aware of all their blessings, he said. "My child has been hit with something debilitating, yet she is showing that she is willing to fight and survive and be the best that she can be. There are little things that continue to remind us about where we've been and where we're going, and I'm very confident that when it's all done, everyone will be happy. Just to have her here speaks volumes. To God be the glory."

Donations are welcomed by the Larry King Cardiac Foundation at 8000 Towers Crescent Dr., 6th Floor, Vienna, VA 22182. You may specify that funds be directed to the Melinda Greene grant.

100th World AIDS Day observed with marches, government measures

BY JOSEPH SCHUMAN
Associated Press Writer

PARIS (AP) — AIDS activists around the world marched, prayed and wore red ribbons to mark the 10th World AIDS Day — while AIDS victims in poor nations did what they did every day: lived, struggled and died in obscurity.

On Monday, at least, their lives were honored.

In Europe, demonstrators observed the day with candlelight marches and songs; in Asia, governments announced new education and health programs aimed at fighting their growing AIDS problem.

Thousands marched in Paris at sundown, blowing whistles and carrying placards demanding more help for victims. Rallies were also held in other French cities.

"They are dying less in France, in the rich countries, but they continue to die more and more in the poor countries," said French Health Minister Bernard Kouchner.

Kouchner announced a plan to require that French doctors report the number of patients who test positive for the AIDS virus, though the names would remain confidential. "If we knew, in epidemiological terms, the number of HIV-positive people, this would vastly help us" fight AIDS, he said.

One in every 100 sexually active people age 15 to 49 worldwide has HIV, and among those infected, only one in 10 knows it, according to UNAIDS and the World Health Organization.

Figures released last week show doctors had underestimated the size of the epidemic by 30 percent: 30 million people now are infected with HIV and 16,000 more people are infected daily. Of the 2.3 million people expected to die this year of AIDS, 460,000 are children under 15.

This year's World AIDS day emphasized the plight of HIV-infected children.

Elsewhere in Europe, 12 Athens radio stations broadcasted an hour-long program on AIDS. Greek state-run television stations aired documentaries on AIDS, a Freddy Mercury concert — the singer who died of AIDS — and a ballet dedicated to the fight against AIDS.

In Helsinki, Finland, lawmakers lighted candles on the steps of Parliament. Some 50 artists performed a free concert in Turku, Finland's former capital on the west coast, with the proceeds going to AIDS support centers.

The World Health Organization said new HIV infections in Western Europe have dropped 10 percent.

While new drug therapies and increased education has slowed the spread of HIV in many industrialized countries, AIDS infection has accelerated in developing countries, where victims and governments cannot afford the costly treatments.

More than 90 percent of HIV-infected people live in the developing world, and the disease is spreading at an alarming rate in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the WHO's regional director for Europe said Monday.

"Eastern Europe is now in the forefront of the AIDS epidemic," Jo E. Asyall said, attributing the increase primarily to intravenous drug use.

In St. Petersburg, Russia, teenage actors dressed as prostitutes and drug addicts drew laughter as they did a skit demonstrating the menace of AIDS. But the performance was followed by a serious message.

"I understand that young people are our future, but who will work with drug addicts, who will work with homosexuals?" AIDS activist Nikolai Panchenkov asked the audience. "No one."

Across Asia, where international health authorities say they believe the number of AIDS and HIV infections is under-reported, World AIDS Day was observed with new awareness



(AP Photo/Susan Sterner)

Jimmy "Jamaicha Ja Toi" Carter sits on the floor of his dining room in Los Angeles, Calif., Sunday, Nov. 30, holding one of the stuffed bears he's received during over a za performer and AIDS fund raiser, learned he had AIDS in 1993. He has seen over 400 friends and acquaintances die of the disease since then.

programs from China to India. In Bombay, demonstrators carried through the streets a wooden effigy of a snake strangling India.

China said it plans to start broadcasting anti-AIDS messages on trains.

In Tokyo, hundreds gathered in a rain-swept square to sing songs and appeal for support and understanding for AIDS victims. A huge tree was set up in the square, illuminated with electric lights and covered with some 17,000 red ribbons sent in from around Japan.

However, in Thailand, economic problems prompted the government to slash funds for a program that bought condoms for prostitutes, and sharply reduced World AIDS day observances in Bangkok.

Outside Nairobi, Kenya, workers at a home for AIDS-infected children went about their usual job Monday — trying to prolong and ease the lives of 50 largely abandoned youngsters.

"The children look at me," said program director Protus Lumiti. "If I am strong, they will be strong. But if I am brooding, they will, too."

Internal Medicine Associates Physician On Call

The Winter Illnesses— Colds and Flu

Q: How do I protect myself and my children from catching a cold this winter?

A: Colds are caused by a virus that is spread from person to person by small water droplets. These can be spread by coughing, sneezing, touching, sharing food or drink, or shaking hands. The best way to control the spread of this virus is wash your hands frequently and avoid contact with sick people. In addition, adequate rest and nutrition may help keep the immune system working well to prevent disease.

Q: What is the difference between colds and the flu?

A: Both colds and the "flu" are caused by viruses. Most colds are caused by either rhinovirus or adenovirus which typically cause a low grade fever, sore throat, cough, and stuffy nose. Influenza is caused by the influenza virus which typically, causes a higher fever and is associated with body aches and fatigue. A sore throat and cough are much worse when you have the flu, usually accompanied by nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Q: Does getting a flu shot really protect me from coming down with the flu?

A: This year's flu shot contains a portion of the virus responsible for the three most common strains of influenza. Ideally, an injection of this type leads to immunity from this illness. However, in case of infection, having been immunized may lead to a less severe illness.

Q: Is there such a thing as a "stomach flu"?

A: "Stomach flu" is a common name for gastroenteritis. Gastroenteritis may be caused by viruses such as rotavirus and by bacteria such as e-coli, salmonella and shigella. It is usually characterized by fever, chills, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Influenza may also cause these symptoms, but it is usually accompanied by respiratory symptoms as well.

Q: Do over-the-counter cold medications work, or are home remedies just as effective?

A: Most over the counter cold medications are low dosages of prescription medications. These are usually sufficient for treatment of minor cold symptoms. Common medicines include pseudoephedrine (active ingredient in sudafed and other decongestants); dextromethorphan (the DM in most cough suppressants); guaifenesin (the expectorant or "thinning agent" found in decongestants and cough syrups); and various antihistamines to decrease nasal and lung secretions. Most home remedies are harmless (such as chicken soup), but you should avoid any home remedy that normally you would not eat, drink, or apply to the skin.



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