

Talks address minority health

BY REBECCA PUTTERMAN
ASSISTANT STATE & NATIONAL EDITOR

There doesn't need to be a sign on the highway that says, "Ghetto Ahead."

Poverty-stricken neighborhoods have easily recognizable signs: billboards, broken-down houses, Mom and Pop stores and cinder-block churches, community activist Nettie Coad said.

Coad, director of the Partnership Project, which aims to undo racism in Guilford County, told a group of public health care professionals Friday that they should actively seek out areas that need assistance to improve minority empowerment in part through access to health care.

She said, with audience members nodding, that people outside the community are responsible for limiting development options even though poor residents are blamed for their community's deficiencies.

The health problems that result from poverty, culture and the environment were the theme of the 29th annual Minority Health Conference, held at UNC's Friday Center and sponsored by the UNC School of Public Health's Minority Student Caucus.

Coad spoke as one of the 15 experts addressing how certain conditions can lead to health problems in minority populations.

"We're focusing more on the social aspects and not specifically diseases like last year's theme on HIV/AIDS," said Janelle Armstrong,

a second-year public health graduate student and co-chairwoman of the event, along with Eboni Taylor.

"It's important to take focus not so much on the individual risk factors but on living conditions, stressors and everyday life — things that ultimately impact health," Taylor said.

The conference overall emphasized the limitations that poverty and the environment place on minority individuals' access to health care.

One of the concurrent discussions considered the impact, or lack thereof, that state-sponsored health care programs have to minority health care.

Jeffery Simms, the community care deputy director of the N.C. Office of Rural Health and Community Care at the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, presented a long list of public health services that he termed inadequate.

"It's only a drop in the bucket to what we need as far as being able to address the uninsured problem in North Carolina," he said.

Simms encouraged the public health students and professionals in the audience to not only continue their public service jobs but to engage in political activism to keep the minorities' health insurance challenges on the state's legislative agenda.

"You as the local community can work to make sure this stays as a priority and continue to put a face on these fundings," he said.

He said building local programs and using evidence to prove that they are effective could improve the likelihood of continued government support.

Break-off groups raised issues relating to illiteracy, immigrant health, cancer disparities, community determinants and environmental inequality.

They stressed the importance of small, local initiatives, such as school-based health centers and community workshops, to combat those and other community health problems aggravated by racial disparity.

"You have to be persistent," said Leslie Morris, director of community relations for the New Jersey Primary Care Association, in answer to participants' concerns about funding, liability and negative stigmas surrounding their own minority health initiatives.

"You start where you start. We always tell people to start where you can."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

National and World News

FROM THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Crucial primaries spur sharp attacks

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Hillary Clinton turned her attention Saturday to the mechanics of delivering voters to the polls in a round of primaries Tuesday that could hold the key to the future of her presidential ambitions.

She also sharpened her criticism of Barack Obama. "His entire campaign is based on a speech he gave at an anti-war rally in 2002," Clinton told reporters. "The speech was not followed up by action, which is part of a pattern that we have seen repeatedly."

Obama fired back at rally in Providence, R.I., telling supporters: "Real change isn't voting for George Bush's war in Iraq and then telling the American people it was actually a vote for more diplomacy when you start running for president."

Putin could maintain a central role through his hand-picked successor

MOSCOW (AP) — Dmitry Medvedev, the man Vladimir Putin hand-picked to be his successor, scored a crushing victory in Russia's presidential elections Sunday, a result that was long anticipated but that still raises questions about who will run this resurgent global power.

Medvedev was on course to win about 70 percent of the vote. He is expected to rule in concert with his mentor, an arrangement

that could see Putin calling the shots despite his constitutionally subordinate position as Russia's prime minister.

Medvedev, 42, the youngest Russian ruler since the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, is expected to heed Putin's advice, continue his assertive course with the West, maintain state control over Russia's mineral riches and freeze out real opposition movements.

Hamas raises stakes in rocket attacks

ASHKELON, Israel (AP) — Residents of this beachside city are still coming to terms with being on the front lines of Israel's battle against Hamas militants.

A dozen long-range rockets slammed into Ashkelon last weekend, marking a significant turning point in the conflict and compelling Israel to strike back hard.

Palestinian militants fire rockets nearly daily at Israeli border towns near Gaza. But by reaching Ashkelon, a city of 120,000 about 11 miles north of Gaza, Hamas raised the stakes. It is one of the largest cities in southern Israel, home to a college and strategic installations like an electric plant and a water purification plant.

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