

## Stanley Leads Volunteer Group With A New Year's Resolution

BY TERRY POPE

Maliston "Mo" Stanley of Shallotte has an important New Year's resolution. He wants to help save some lives in Brunswick County.

Stanley and a group of about 20 volunteers will carry a message in 1992 from the Brunswick County Health Department to people in all communities, covering neighborhoods from Leland to Calabash.

It's a message the Health Department staff needed help to deliver—of how North Carolina is third in the nation in deaths attributed to hypertension, or high blood pressure, a disease that affects one out of every four Americans and one of every three blacks.

As a member of the Brunswick County Board of Health and a former public educator, Stanley is often viewed as a community leader. The tall, athletic and successful businessman stepped forward as a volunteer when Nursing Supervisor Nancy Leggett asked for help with the Health Department's hypertension program. He quickly spread the word among other community leaders, forming a network of messengers.

"I hand picked people from a list," explains Stanley. "I didn't necessarily ask them, I told them. But once we got together, it was amazing at the chemistry that existed and the support for the idea."

It was also an eye-opening experience for the volunteers, who had their blood pressure checked at the meeting. Three men who didn't even know they were victims found out they had high blood pressure, said Stanley.

"Here we were talking about how we could reach these people," said Stanley, "and it was right here among us, in our own group. From that one meeting alone, we have helped make a difference in three peoples' lives."

Minority males are difficult to target for screening, said Ms. Leggett, for most people who have their blood tested are female. Also, economic hardships often keep blacks from seeing their doctors regularly. Males are often blue-collar workers, spending long hours on the job and away from church and civic groups that discuss health issues.

The volunteers have met twice and will meet again Dec. 30. Their first goal is to coordinate a countywide screening in February, during Black History Month. The group of volunteers continues to grow as word spreads. Stanley hopes it can lead to cooperation among various leaders, linking blacks together to discuss and to help solve other problems affecting their communities countywide.

"I never realized it would snowball as it has," he added. "They want to keep it alive. They want to talk about other things. And that's okay."

When the volunteers met last, their conversations turned to drug abuse, poverty, crime and "a wide gamut

of things that we can work on," said Stanley.

"It's my feeling, as well as the people in the group, that we have to do more things like this," said Stanley. "I know that we're going to do that. We're not going to let this die. Maybe this is the starting point."

Stanley doesn't have high blood pressure, which can be hereditary or brought on by poor eating habits, excessive intake of salt and a lack of exercise. The former college basketball star still stays in shape through pick-up games and sometimes walks three to four miles per day.

"That's not to say that I couldn't have it tomorrow," he adds.

or above normal for longer than a few days.

Men and women of any race, active or inactive, strong or weak, tense or relaxed can have hypertension. If left untreated, it can lead to a heart attack, stroke or kidney problems. Medicine can help control high blood pressure, along with cutting back on fried foods and salts, limiting alcoholic drinks, cutting back on smoking, eating less and exercising more.

"It's a difficult task telling someone they will have to make a change in their normal behavior," said Stanley. "That's tough."

The progress made in just a few short months has

discussed ways to build better rapport with the black communities.

The Brunswick County group has met to learn more about high blood pressure from area health experts, so they can go back into their communities and spread the right information about the silent killer. The group will also act as a support group, for at screenings a person may be told they have hypertension, but it's no guarantee the patient will seek treatment.

"In public health we will see that person, but you never know if they actually go to a doctor or not," said Ms. Leggett. "This group wants to be able to reinforce that message, maybe make some lifestyle changes and encourage a better diet and exercise. That may help prevent a stroke in the future."

No one really knows why blacks have a higher incidence of high blood pressure than whites. Overall, not as many males go to the doctor, and different attempts have been unsuccessful to reach the high-risk black males, said Ms. Leggett.

"We do blood pressure screenings and give programs for high blood pressure," she said, "but this has been a group of people we have not been able to reach. We were kind of determined to find some way to get to this group."

North Carolina is among a group of states known as "the Stroke Belt" by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. The leading cause of male deaths in North Carolina, according to 1988 data, are heart disease, cancer and cerebrovascular disease, which includes strokes brought on by high blood pressure.

In Brunswick County, white males die from heart disease and cancer at a higher rate than non-white males. But the story is different for cerebrovascular disease, which kills 59.2 of every 100,000 blacks and 36.6 of every 100,000 whites, according to the Health Department.

"It's important because it's affecting people's lives," said Stanley. "When we talk about it being a killer of minority people, that's not to say that it's not affecting non-minorities."

If someone checks your blood and the top number is 140 or higher and the bottom number is 90 or higher, then you have high blood pressure.

Stanley said working with the group has helped him return something to a community that has helped in his family's success.

"It's always been our goal, our desire, to give something back to the community," said Stanley, "not just to young blacks but to all persons."

In 1992, he and his group of volunteers may be giving Brunswick County residents the most important gift of all—a chance to live a longer and healthier life.



MALISTON STANLEY and Nancy Leggett hope to come face-to-face in 1992 with Brunswick County residents who have high blood pressure. Their goal is to get patients the proper treatment that can help save their lives.

STAFF PHOTO BY TERRY POPE

The department wants to reach the younger black population with its hypertension screening, or persons under 65. The program isn't just limited to blacks, noted Stanley.

"The program is concerned about all people," said Stanley. "It's just that we've found the risk and incident of death to be much greater among blacks."

Persons can have high blood pressure and feel normal, with no pain and no visible signs. Blood pressure is the force or pressure that moves the blood through your body. Hypertension is when the blood pressure stays high

surprised Ms. Leggett.

"I'm real impressed," she said. "They're really interested in doing something for their community. We're real fortunate to have someone like Mo Stanley on the Health Board."

The Health Department operates three adult health outreach programs funded by the state, one of which is for a hypertension program. At a state workshop earlier this year, Ms. Leggett and other health care workers were discouraged and felt the hypertension screenings were not reaching the targeted, high-risk males. They dis-

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