The “State of Minority Health in Arkansas” event was a huge success with more than 150 people in attendance. A broad community of grassroots citizens, legislators and public health advocates came together on March 1 at the UAMS Jackson T. Stephens Spine and Neurosciences Institute auditorium.

Included were representatives of the Arkansas Department of Health; Arkansas Center for Health Improvement; Department of Human Services; UAMS Delta AHEC; Arkansas State Hospital; Arkansas Cancer Society; Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families; Little Rock Black Nurses Association; Arkansas Foundation for Medical Care; Arkansas Heart Hospital; and UAMS College of Public Health, to name a few.

Also in attendance, were State Representatives Robbie Wills, David Rainey and Clark Hall.

The event was presented by the Arkansas Minority Health Commission (AMHC), the Arkansas Legislative Black Caucus and the Arkansas Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Association (AMDPA). With partnering co-hosts, the AMHC lead a panel discussion to provide broad awareness about their roles and efforts toward addressing minority health in Arkansas.

The event was moderated by Senator Joyce Elliott. “This event is meant to serve as an introductory session for us to recognize the problem and move forward in future sessions to finding the solutions,” said Elliott, “There is still much more for us to do.”

The event was opened by Executive Director of the Arkansas Minority Health Commission, Idonia Trotter, J.D., M.P.S. “This is the first of a series of discussions AMHC has planned throughout the year to bring greater awareness of public health related to minorities in Arkansas. Working together, we can make a difference in the foreseeable future,” Trotter stated.

Panelists were Senator Tracy Steele, Arkansas Legislative Black Caucus; Senator Jack Crumbly, Senate Subcommittee on Minority Health; Creshelle Nash, M.D., AMHC; Billy Thomas, M.D., AMDPA; Elaine Prewitt, DrPh, UAMS College of Public Health; Christine Patterson, M.S.W., Arkansas Department of Health; and Eddie Ochoa, M.D., UAMS College of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics.

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The Arkansas Minority Health Commission hosted a health fair on Thursday, Feb. 25 at the State Capitol during the state’s first ever fiscal session.

Approximately 55 people were documented as receiving health screenings. Screeners were from UAMS Living Well with Sickle Cell and Spit for the Cure, the Pulaski County Health Unit and Jefferson Comprehensive Care. Screenings offered to attendees were blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol, HIV testing, flu (H1N1 and seasonal) and sickle cell. Vendors who participated in the health fair were AARP Arkansas, Arkansas Department of Health, William H. Bowen School of Law Black Law Students Association Health Initiative, Senior Health Insurance Information Program, Susan G. Komen for the Cure, The Witness Project, UAMS Esperanza y Vida and Mexican Consulate, Arkansas State Hospice and Palliative Care Association, Arkansas Forestry Commission, Arkansas Prostate Cancer Foundation, Asian Pacific Coalition, Connect Care-ADH and Department of Human Services-Division of Aging. Information on the Medicare program and Medicare saving was also available.

The health fair was followed by a well-attended legislative meeting sponsored by the Senate Public Health, Welfare and Labor Subcommittee on Minority Health. Members of the community as well as vendors from the health fair participated in spirited discussions regarding the health and well-being of all Arkansans. Approximately 38 people attended the meeting including members of the General Assembly and Arkansas Legislative Black Caucus. Community members voiced concerns of mental health among minority communities and who is considered a minority. Senator Crumbly gave a snapshot of health status of minority Arkansans and shared legislation passed in 2009 that will benefit the future of minority health. AMHC medical director, Creshelle Nash, M.D.; Eduardo Ochua, UAMS; and Joe Bates of the Arkansas Department of Health gave presentations on health disparities and how good oral health contributes to good overall health. Senator Shane Broadway as well as Representatives Nancy Blount, David Rainey, John Charles Edwards, Darrin Williams and Monty Davenport were in attendance.

AMHC staff member, Rachel Hopes (left), shares nutrition information with a health fair participant.

Meeting attendees listen intently to Senator Crumbly’s presentation of the life expectancy disparity among Arkansas counties.

Drs. Creshelle Nash (l) and Eddie Ochoa(r) share findings from study “Arkansas Racial and Ethnic Disparities II” released in January.

Join us in Springdale for our next health fair. See page 6 for more details.
AMHC Medical Director, Creshelle Nash, M.D., opened the panel discussion by explaining the role of the AMHC in public health. She pointed out her unique perspective as a practicing physician, medical director and instructor in the UAMS College of Public Health. “Our role as the Minority Health Commission is to continue to be a catalyst in the area of health disparities and influence systematic change,” said Nash.

As a whole, Senator Steele said “Arkansas is a much healthier state.” We may not get a fair shake in national averages, but compared to other southern states, Arkansas is healthier. The state is even healthier than it was 20 or even 10 years ago due to legislation like the Clean Indoor Act of 2006, Tobacco Tax and a Trauma System established through legislation recently.”

Although these things are in place there are still health disparities between white and nonwhite Arkansans. Elaine Prewitt, DrPh, said, “There is pervasive and empirical evidence that disparities exist and has a substantial impact on society” citing the findings of an article from the Institute of Medicine.

Senator Crumbly used the counties in Southeast Arkansas as an example. “Ground Zero”, as he calls the Delta area of Arkansas, sees the most significant disparities in the state. The life expectancy of someone living in these counties is 10 years less than someone living in Northwest Arkansas. “To me, that is just unacceptable.” Crumbly commended the work of the Arkansas Minority Health Commission in bringing greater awareness in these communities and identified laws that the state has implemented that’s meant to decrease disparities. However, he also urged a push for personal responsibility among minorities in taking control of their own health and turning the tide on the noted disparities.

And what about children?

Eddie Ochoa, M.D., pointed out that more minority children live in poverty than whites. He also said that those who have less education attainment have poorer health. In terms of self-help, infants have no self-help skills. It’s in the hands of the parent to Introduce healthier eating habits. In terms of improving health of children, “community empowerment and public policy are more likely to help children,” he said.

To combat these staggering statistics, Billy Thomas, M.D., expressed the need to start at the beginning and produce better students. He said that society has a need for diversity in health care and emphasized that universities must have better systems in place in order to retain minority students and faculty. “We know that many minority students face greater challenges. Most are personal problems but they evolve to academic problems,” said Dr. Thomas. Thomas emphasized that preparation for minority students in the health care workforce must begin early on getting them ready for the academic rigors required.

Educating minority communities about health care and health disparities is also of great importance. As a staff member of the Arkansas Department Health, Patterson, asserted that the ADH made literature easier to read for lay persons. “An individual must understand the information that is presented in order to make better health decisions and to stay informed,” said Patterson.

As for the future of minority health, the panelists’ want to see more diversity in health care, decrease in health disparities, public health moved to the forefront in legislation, and see the day when panel discussions like the “State of Minority Health in Arkansas” are no longer needed.

The event closed with remarks from UAMS Chancellor, Daniel Rahn, M.D. A native of Georgia, Rahn expressed his admiration for Arkansans. “The people here really care about Arkansas,” said Rahn. In the area of health disparities and access, he said, “We (health care professionals and policy makers) must partner and take a holistic approach. We benefit from each others’ knowledge and must capitalize on that knowledge in the broadest way.”

To view photos from the event, go to arminorityhealth.com.
All photos by Knoxie Hall.
Find the State of Minority Health on YouTube.com
Three Former U.S. Surgeons General highlight the Arkansas Minority Health Summit: “Healthy People 2020: Health Equity for All Arkansans”

The Arkansas Minority Health Commission (AMHC), in collaboration with the Office of Governor Mike Beebe, Philander Smith College, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health, UAMS Center for Diversity Affairs, Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) Office of Minority Health, University of Arkansas (UofA) College of Education and Health Professions, and the Migrant Education Program, Boston Mountain Education Cooperative will hold the Arkansas Minority Health Summit 2010 at Philander Smith College in Little Rock, Arkansas April 15, 2010.

The theme for this summit is Healthy People 2020: Health Equity for All Arkansans. The summit will center on progress toward the achievement of CDC Healthy People 2010 goals and aspirations for 2020. Specifically, it will address the health status of minority Arkansans through presentations, discussions and workshops dealing with subject matter ranging from the social determinants of health to the health care workforce pipeline.

The Summit will open with a distinguished panel featuring 17th Surgeon General, Richard Carmona, M.D., M.P.H., FACS, 16th Surgeon General, David Satcher, M.D., Ph.D., and 15th Surgeon General, Joycelyn Elders, M.D. They will share their perspective on minority health policy, practice and other issues in the context of the national health agenda. This Summit represents the FIRST TIME in Arkansas history that such a panel of experts has gathered in one place to discuss issues that impact the minority community in particular.

Other distinguished speakers at the summit will include Thomas LaVeist, Ph.D., Professor in Health Policy and Director of the Hopkins Center for Health Disparities Solution and Camara Jones, M.D., M.P.H., Ph.D., Research Director on Social Determinants of Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

Registration for the Minority Health Summit is $30 to pay by check and $27 to pay online. Online registration is available at arminorityhealth.com.

You Don’t Want to Miss It! Register at arminorityhealth.com
April is National Minority Health Month

In recognition, the Arkansas Minority Health Commission will announce grant awards to community-based, non-profit organizations that applied for up to $1000 in sponsorship of events planned during the month of April. Each organization will engage in activities that focus on health promotion and disease prevention in minority communities! Awardees will be announced on Friday, April 9 at 10 a.m. in Little Rock at Arkansas Baptist College along with Public Health Heroes awards announced as a part of Public Health Week in Arkansas. Join us!

Arkansas Public Health Week

AMHC joins statewide partners across the state and the nation this year in celebrating Arkansas Public Health Week. This year’s theme is “A Healthier Arkansas: One Community at a Time.” Join public health partners on Friday, April 9 at 10 a.m. at Arkansas Baptist College for a Public Health Week and Minority Health Month Press Conference. For more information on Public Health Week and how you can help make Arkansas Healthier, visit www.healthyarkansas.gov.

AMHC will host community health fair in Springdale

The Arkansas Minority Health Commission (AMHC) will host a community health fair on Saturday, April 24, 2010 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at The Jones Center for Families in Springdale, Ark., at 922 East Emma Avenue.

Free health screenings for blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol, and sickle cell will be provided for residents in and around the Springdale area. AMHC has teamed up with the AARP/Walgreen Bus Tour to provide health screenings. Vendors will be on hand to provide important health information. Lunch will be provided.

AMHC is seeking volunteer interpreters in both Spanish and Marshallese. Please call Hanan Givens at 683-2720 to obtain a volunteer interest form or go to arminorityhealth.com.

AMHC will host a public forum on Friday, April 23, 2010. This will take place from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. in the Generations Room. The meeting is open to the public. All residents in the Springdale area are encouraged to attend.
The first edition of “bridge” will feature the force behind the creation of the Arkansas Minority Health Commission, Dr. Joycelyn Elders. The publication will include profiles of Arkansans making strides in minority health including Grace Donoho, retired director of the Jones Center for Families, who established the “welcome wagon” concept for the Marshallese community in Northwest Arkansas. Other profiles will include Senator Jack Crumbly, Senator Tracy Steele and AMHC’s own Dr. Creshelle Nash. The publication will demonstrate how the Commission educates Arkansans about healthier living through policy, outreach, research and various pilot projects.
This month is a special one. April 2010 not only marks the observance of Minority Health Month, but will also mark several milestones in the life of the Arkansas Minority Commission. The Commission will host the first Arkansas Minority Health Summit kicked off by Governor Beebe and featuring three former surgeons general. We will also debut the first issue of our semi-annual magazine, “bridge.” And this first issue of “The Minority Report” you are reading will have also been launched during the very special month of April.

While the Summit and the magazine will provide great jump starts for continued biennial convening and semi-annual exposés, the newsletter will offer our appointing/oversight authorities, partners, and constituents a monthly update of Commission activities and progress, as well as minority health news and information. I can’t help but be excited at this unprecedented opportunity for the Commission to connect with Arkansans across the state about the important and cross-cutting issue of minority health. As Arkansas’ minority health overlaps with its physical and fiscal health, how much and how quickly we progress toward realizing health equity is of critical importance to every resident of our great state.

It is with health equity in mind that the Commission operates toward fulfilling its own mission along with the legislative mandates that define, empower and fund it. Twelve dedicated volunteer commissioners appointed by the governor, president pro tem and house speaker; serve Arkansas and her people in front of an excellent staff but behind the scenes of the agency’s day-to-day activities. Each commissioner contributes unique professional experiences and personal perspectives that have made the Commission the strong, effective and active board that it is today. In the Commission’s effort to update Arkansans about a variety of familiar minority health concerns as well as the numerous issues that are too often under recognized, this corner of the newsletter will be reserved for commissioners’ contributions to this monthly update.

In the first issue of The Minority Report and during this particularly special month of April, I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to highlight the critical issue of the health care workforce diversity in Arkansas. I do not have enough space in this corner to cite detailed quotes and statistics in groundbreaking national reports like “Missing Persons: Minorities in the Health Professions” by the Sullivan Commission on Diversity in the Healthcare Workforce. In 2004, this report revealed damning racial and ethnic inequity in the health professions, linking this inequity to racial and ethnic health disparities. There are not enough pages in this newsletter to adequately elaborate on the fact that our nation’s health professions have never reached or kept pace with ever changing racial and ethnic demographics. So that while African Americans, Hispanics and American Indians, as a group constitute nearly 25 percent of the U.S. Population, these three groups account for less than 9 percent of nurses, 6 percent of physicians and only 5 percent of dentists.

In Arkansas the gap is even wider as its African American population is larger and poorer than the nation’s as a whole, and as its Hispanic population is growing at one of the fastest rates in the country. Meanwhile, the number and percentage of minority health professionals sits below national figures. Besides the moral imperative that compels public attention and state action; the practical motives of health equity for all Arkansans and the fiscal health of the state are reasons enough for all Arkansans to act in a more aggressive and collaborative way to close this gap – parents, educators, primary and secondary schools, two and four year colleges, health care institutions, policymakers – all of us.

Vivian L. Flowers, M.P.S., was appointed to the Arkansas Minority Health Commission in 2000 and has served as its Chair since 2008. She works as Director of Recruitment for Diversity at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, and is a resident of Pine Bluff.
“Ask the Doctor”
Post questions @ www.power923.com

Every Third Tuesday on the
Broadway Joe Morning Show
7am-9am

with Dr. Creshelle Nash, Medical Director of
the Arkansas Minority Health Commission

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