UAPB students and faculty see the face of HIV first hand

Marvely Brown speaks to crowd of 200 for National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

In recognition of National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, the Arkansas Minority Health Commission (AMHC) in partnership with the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB), University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff’s HIV/AIDS Peer Educators, Arkansas Department of Health (ADH), Jefferson Comprehensive Care System, Inc. (JCCSI), Greater than AIDS, and the Black AIDS Institute, presented the Ask & Tell Speed Dating Event February 7th. Speakers were Letsie Bass and Dr. Elbert Bennett of UAPB, Courtney Hampton of ADH and Derrick Newby of JCCSI. The keynote speaker was HIV/AIDS activist and author, Marvely Brown, who shared her story of how she contracted HIV at 19 and her life since diagnosis.

Marvely discovered that she had HIV after being admitted into the hospital with pneumonia. When the doctor walked in to tell her the news he stated that ‘I’m sorry to have to tell you this.’ Her first thoughts were “oh my God I’m pregnant.” He said ‘no you are HIV positive.’ She didn’t understand what HIV was so she began to call friends and family to get answers. After making her second phone call to her friend that was pregnant she was told that she would no longer be the child’s godmother.

She continued to call person after person. By the time she made it to her sister, her sister had already known. This was within 10 minutes of finding out she was HIV positive. She called her mom who stated ‘don’t tell anyone anything, you tell everyone that you have cancer.’ Little did Marvely understand she was trying to protect her.

Following her diagnoses, Marvely went through tremendous emotional ups and downs. She experienced stigma beyond belief—in church, school and even at home. Marvely’s refuge became her car which she lived in.

“I wanted to die,” said Marvely. “I knew that I was going to die. I was ready to die.”

Marvely even posed for her own obituary photo. She had come

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Author and HIV/AIDS Activist Marvely Brown
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to terms with her desire to die until one night she had a near death experience.

“If I never felt God, I definitely felt him at that moment,” said Marvelyn. “Despite having HIV, I still had life.”

She had her first speaking engagement on a college campus. One of the students got up and said ‘You are my hero and my inspiration.’

At that moment, Marvelyn decided that it was time for her to become her own hero.

Now Marvelyn moves both national and international audiences with her compelling personal story. She has spoken at hundreds of colleges, universities, churches and conferences worldwide. She released her autobiography, The Naked Truth: Young, Beautiful and (HIV) Positive in 2008.

“In Arkansas we are in the bible belt. It’s so difficult to get people to talk about HIV because they are afraid,” said AMHC Executive Director, Dr. Idonia Trotter. “Marvelyn is truly a hero and our hope is that networks will increase throughout the state to provide support to HIV consumers with similar stories as Marvelyn’s,” she said.

Following Marvelyn’s presentation six student representatives from various UAPB organizations demonstrated how to incorporate HIV into a discussion.

The presentation was followed by free HIV testing in which 107 attendees were tested. Of the 107 who completed an evaluation form, 32 percent were first time testers, 97 percent reported that the event taught them how to have a conversation about HIV and 96 percent said the event increased their knowledge of HIV.

The Facts in Arkansas

Through December 31, 2010, it is estimated that 5,178 persons are known to be living with HIV infection in Arkansas. There have been 1,954 deaths reported through December 31, 2010, among persons who were known to be HIV-infected since 1983. In 2010, African Americans comprised 15 percent of the population of Arkansas, but accounted for 43 percent of new HIV diagnosis and 51 percent of new AIDS diagnosis.

-Arkansas Center for Health Statistics, Arkansas Department of Health
2nd Biennial Arkansas Minority Health Summit

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In collaboration with the 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 & Health Disparities

To Register: www.arminorityhealth.com
For More Information Contact: Kendal Booker
Email: arminorityhealth@gmail.com
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Shape Up Arkansas teams battle for a chance to win and lose BIG

In 2011, the Arkansas Minority Health Commission partnered with Cumulus Broadcasting owner of Power 92, KOKY and Praise for the "Shape Up Arkansas" challenge. Nine participants are competing in a 12-week contest for a chance to win cash prizes (provided by Cumulus). The winner of the Shape Up Arkansas challenge will be announced Friday, April 20th at the 2nd Biennial Arkansas Minority Health Summit held at Philander Smith College.

Shape Up Arkansas is now in its eighth week and the teams are in full swing. Members from Team Wow, Team Fit and Team Sweat post comments on Shape Up Arkansas’s Facebook page to encourage each other and to promote their success.

The teams’ second weigh-in was February 16th. Each team has been extremely successful in their weight loss goals. Team Wow (Trainer Kameelah Wesley) has lost 40lbs and Team Sweat (Trainer Darrell Ellis) has lost 73lbs. Team Fit (Trainer Phyllis Hodges) is currently leading with 87lbs. The teams’ combined weight loss is 175lbs!

“Participating in Shape Up Arkansas has taught me a lot about exercise, choosing the proper foods, appropriate servings, hard work and dedication, said Kellie Martin of Team Sweat.

“My body is on fire and I keep hearing that’s a good thing,” said Tarja Smith of Team Wow.

The next weigh-in is March 15th. During the weigh-ins, AMHC, in partnership with Arkansas Children’s Hospital and University of Arkansas’s Division of Agriculture Research and Extension, provide educational workshops and food demonstrations. Stay tuned and see the Shape Up Arkansas Facebook page to follow your team for a chance to win a prize if your team wins!!
Roundtable reveals state's college enrollment and graduation rates

The fourth meeting in the Public Health Leaders Roundtable series was held in January at the UAMS Jackson T. Stephens Spine and Neurosciences Institute. As a continuation of the November 2011 meeting, Communications Coordinator of the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, Brandy Hinkle, was invited to provide a snap shot of the state's college enrollment and graduation statistics.

She reported that in Fall 2009, 8,900 students received the Lottery Scholarship Fund followed by 31,000 students in Fall 2010.

In Arkansas, students must obtain 2 of the 3 required components for the lottery scholarship:
- Score 19 or above on ACT
- 2.5 GPA
- Graduate from an Arkansas high school
- Complete the Smart Core Curriculum

Sixty-nine percent of white students and 27 percent of black students received scholarship funds. Despite the increase in scholarships awarded, Arkansas ranks 49th in the country for college graduates.

"Students know how to get to college but they don't know what to do once they are there to be successful," said Hinkle.

She stated that most non-traditional students are more successful in completing college but need remediation either in math or reading. African American students have higher remediation rates than whites with 82 percent and 42.5 percent respectively. Overall, Hinkle stated, Arkansas's remediation rates have decreased by 2.1 percent.

Hinkle closed by providing programs designed to improve enrollment and graduation rates such as the common core standards, college and career coaches and a $1 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to implement initiatives for student success in minority, non-traditional and underrepresented students.

The next Public Health Leaders Roundtable will be held during the 2nd Biennial Arkansas Minority Health Summit and will focus on "action" steps toward increasing the percentage of minorities practicing in health care professions.
The Affordable Healthcare Act: Ouachita County Residents learn what is available now and what is to be expected

The Arkansas Minority Health Commission presented its third public forum of the quarter January 20th in Camden, Ark. More than 60 residents heard vital information regarding the health rankings of Ouachita County and the Affordable Health Care Act.

Ouachita County Health Unit Administrator, Rebecca Wright, shared that out of 75 counties in Arkansas, Ouachita County ranks #60 in health outcomes and #35 in health behaviors in terms of smoking, obesity, excessive drinking, STDs and teen birth rate.

Creshelle Nash, M.D., MPH, AMHC Medical Consultant, continued the discussion by defining health disparities and the importance of using the terms health equity.

“Presence of health disparity is health inequity, said Dr. Nash. “As a state, we can no longer be satisfied with being #45 and #48 in health rankings.”

Marquita Little, assistant director of policy and planning of the Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services gave an overview of healthcare changes that will occur by 2014 and changes that have occurred so far.

The following changes have occurred:
• No co-pay for preventive services
• Dependents are covered on parents’ insurance until age 26
• Individuals can no longer be denied coverage for pre-existing conditions
• There are no spending limits for healthcare coverage

The following are the changes that are expected:
• The Healthcare Exchange will provide more options for health insurance consumers
• The expansion of Medicaid has the potential to add 200,000 additional Arkansans
• Insurance companies will have a cap on administrative costs

The audience was also introduced to the Arkansas State Health Equity Collaborative, a group comprised of key decision makers from government and community organizations that are currently committed to helping Arkansas achieve optimal health. Little shared the group’s focus areas that include improving health
insurance enrollment systems and engaging communities in policy creation.

The audience posed questions and concerns regarding expensive prescription costs, health and nutrition education programs and healthcare access in addition to cultural competency.

AMHC commissioner, Dr. F. Roosevelt Gilliam pointed out that unfortunately in minority and rural communities the residents don’t have options of going elsewhere when they have received poor healthcare service due to low numbers of physicians and caregivers.

"We must understand that this system is overtaxed, overburdened and undercompensated, said Dr. Gilliam. "We have to bring these issues to our legislators in order to improve the system."

In attendance were Senator Gene Jeffress and House Representative Garry Smith.

The next day approximately 200 residents took advantage of free health screenings and information. The Commission was joined by the Vision Vitals Foundation who provided vision and glaucoma screenings. These screenings were sponsored by The Friends of the Congressional Glaucoma Caucus Foundation.

AMHC’s next public forum and health fair will be held July 20-21 in Stuttgart, AR. For more information or to become a vendor, contact Legoria Payton at legoria.payton@bcglobal.net.

Questions regarding the Affordable Health Care Act? View Health Reform Hits Main Street a video from the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.
Register for Camp iRock

The Arkansas Minority Health Commission (AMHC) is now accepting applications for Camp iRock 2012, to be held June 3rd-9th at Ferncliff Camp and Conference Center seven miles west of Little Rock. Camp iRock is a free, week-long experience that takes advantage of interactive dialogue, workshops, and exercises to promote physical activity, healthy lifestyles and self-confidence in young girls.

Eligible applicants must be Arkansas residents entering grades 6th-8th during the 2012-2013 school year. The camp provides services to any citizen in Arkansas regardless of race or ethnic background. For a complete list of eligibility requirements, more information, or to apply for Camp iRock, visit the camp’s website at campirock.com or email Shayla Alexander at Shayla.alexander@arkansas.gov

Hurry! Deadline to register is March 9th!