

Dr. Height's Focus on Health

The NCNW program emphasis on health is a “Call for Action.” The disparity in health status between African Americans and their white counterparts is an American atrocity. As Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “...of all the forms of inequity, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane...” NCNW’s program emphasis on improving the health status of women includes refocusing on “health and wellness,” not illness and disease. As defined by the World Health Organization, health is more than the absence of diseases—it is a state of well-being.



Mary McLeod Bethune always stressed the holistic approach to women’s health—the well-being of the body, mind and spirit. Such clear goals lay bare many obstacles that must claim our best efforts now. Our ability to employ health services to tackle urgent, solely physical health concerns is daunting enough. When we add seeking services that heal and restore minds and spirits, the task seems overwhelming. Access to quality healthcare should mean access to health services that are effective, safe, timely, patient-centered and address one’s body, mind and spirit. These services must be affordable and available, whether one resides in a rural, urban or suburban community.

Quality healthcare mandates continued assessment of the efficacy of health services and must reflect the best of what is known, especially as it relates to prevention. This knowledge must be used to strengthen prevention programs, especially where a disproportionate burden of disease is seen in a specific population. African American women are disproportionately impacted by heart disease, cancer, obesity and HIV/AIDS, for instance. If health disparities are to be eliminated and progress to optimal health* is to be achieved, biomedical research must equitably include African American women and assure that they are also the recipients of the knowledge generated by the research.

We must continue to press our government to move our country into the group of nations who provide quality healthcare to all their citizens. It is achievable. To quote Harold Freeman, M.D., “if we applied just what is known now to everyone,” we would catapult our country’s overall health status from its shameful position to a point comparable to our economic stature.

While we remain unrelenting in our quest for “healthcare of equal and high-quality for all,” we must also incorporate “what’s known” into self-care. We often say to one another “take care of yourself” and that is more than an admonition. It is recognition that many of us do a great job in caring for others but fail miserably in caring for ourselves. Our self-neglect as African American women has helped perpetuate racial disparities in health status. No longer can we allow this to be the case. We are challenged to “self-care.” Our ability to change and model self-care to future generations is critical. The quality of the care and nurturing that we give our loved ones is dependent upon the care and nurturing that we give ourselves and accept from those who love us.

The NCNW program emphasis on health provides women with the tools to remain informed and poised to impact legislative policies that secure quality healthcare services for all. NCNW's loving and supportive milieu promotes the development of "self-care" competencies essential for progression to optimal health.

For helpful research, go to www.cdc.gov, www.4woman.gov, and www.mywebmd.com.