

The Magnificent Healing Lady

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT
READER HAS JUST TAKEN ME TO TASK FOR NOT INCLUDING A FEMALE IN MY PORTRAITS OF BLACK CONTRIBUTORS TO MEDICINE.

I was saving this gem for a special monograph to be published this spring, but let me add this bit of reassurance to those women who might wonder if they had carved a place in the early history of the healing arts.

Mary Seacole, born in Kingston, Jamaica (1805) was a nurse whose reputation just after the Crimean War in Europe (1853-56) rivalled or surpassed that of the renowned Florence Nightingale. Again, I am indebted to that international "Electronic Information Superhighway" for a continuous flow of documentation of important elements of black history. At the end of this article you will find citations of several key sources.

Mary's mother was a competent practitioner of Jamaican traditional medicine and kept a boarding-house where she cared for invalid officers and their wives. She is said to have "soaked up" medical knowledge from early childhood and in early youth had gained a reputation as "a skillful nurse and doctress". Before and after marriage to a Horatio Seacole, she traveled widely -- twice to England and then, in 1851 during the California Gold Rush, she joined her brother Edward in Panama where she opened a hotel.

During this period she saved her first cholera patient and began the foundation for a well-deserved inter-

national reputation. Like our other medical pioneers of color Mary suffered outrageous slurs and insults. "A white American suggested that she be bleached in order to make her as acceptable in any company as she deserves to be". A woman of high intelligence and quick wit, Mary wrote the man a stinging letter which ended "...as to the society which the process [of bleaching] might gain me admission into, all I can say is, that, judging from the specimens I have met with here, I don't think I shall lose much by being excluded from it. So, gentlemen, I drink to you and the general reformation of American manners".

The autumn of 1853 found her in London where news came of the collapse of the British army's nursing system in the Crimea and the agonies heightened by gross mismanagement. Volunteering here services she repeatedly turned down, even by one of the noted Florence Nightingale's assistants. Mary said, "I read in her face the fact that had there been a vacancy, I should not have been chosen to fill it". Fortunately for the British and thousands of suffering soldiers, she had a relative called Day with whom a business enterprise was formed and they proceeded to set up a store and hotel at the main British army camp in the Crimea.

Mary Seacole's British hotel (and army store, dispensary, hospital, etc.) opened its doors in the summer of 1855 near the besieged town of Sevstopol, Russia, a lieutenant in the 63rd West Suffolk regiment wrote, "She was a wonderful woman--all the men swore by her, and in any case of any malady would seek mary's advice and use her herbal medicines, in pref-

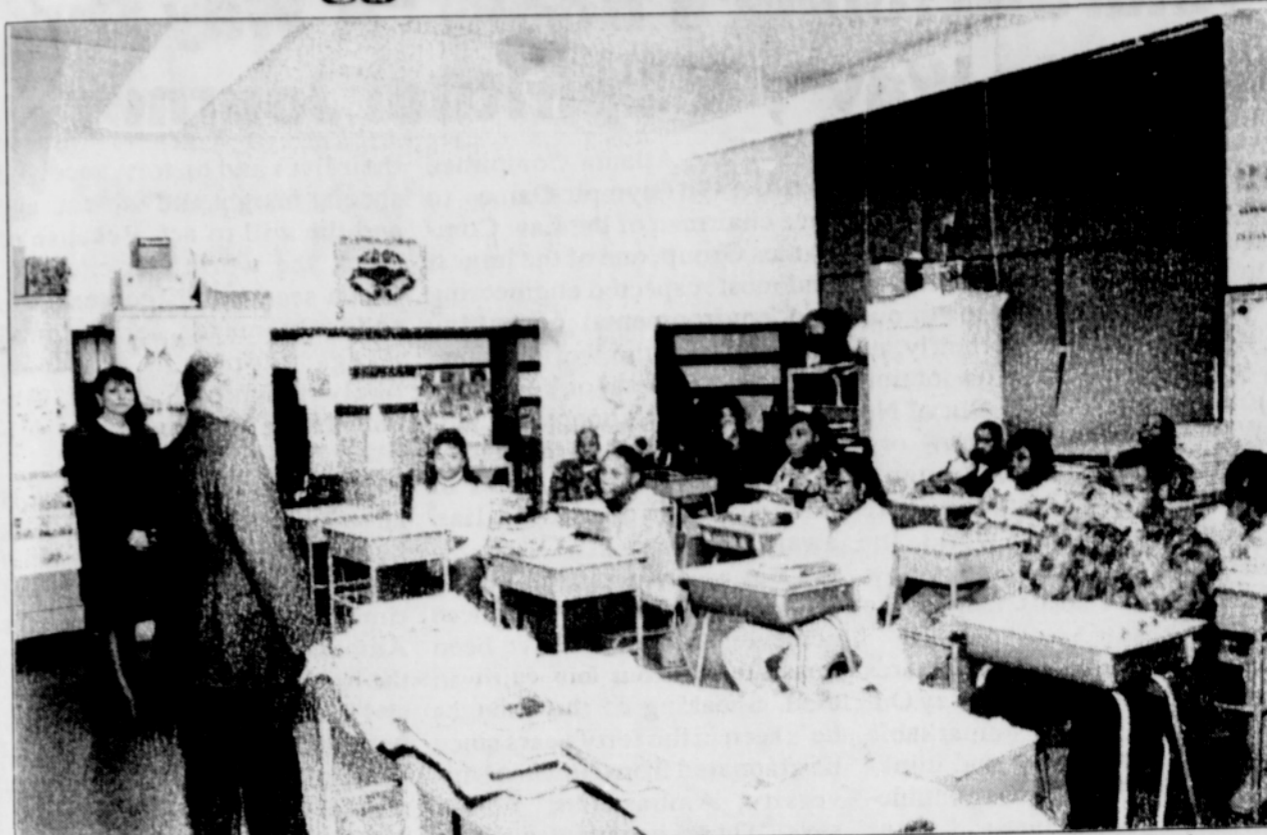
erence to reporting themselves to their own doctors...her never failing presence among the wounded after a battle and assisting them made her beloved by the rank and file of the whole army".

It was with Russen, the first modern war correspondent who made Mary Seacole famous in England, "This kind and successful physician", he wrote in a dispatch dated September 14, 1855, "doctors and cores all manner of man with extraordinary success...I have seen her go down under fire and a more tender or skillful hand about a wound or a broken limb could not be found among our best surgeons".

But the end of the war left Mary back in England, broke and with a lot of unused military stores on hand. A letter in the London Times asks, "While the benevolent deeds of Florence Nightingale are being handed down to posterity...are the humbler deeds of Mrs. Seacole to be forgotten?" Lord Robley and another British commander in the Crimea staged a gigantic four-day musical benefit for her at the Royal Gardens--1000 performers, nine military bands. So it is that she did not die in poverty and left forgotten.

Mary published an autobiography in 1857, "Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole In Many Lands". Other citations are Alexander and Dewjee, Mary Seacole: Jamaican National Heroine and Doctress In The Crimean War, Brent Library Service, 1982. Ed. W.J.S., Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole In Many Lands, James Blackwood, 1858 and Frederick Robinson, Dairy Of The Crimean War, Richard Bentley, 1861 (P.290).

"Maggie's American Dream"



Noted psychiatrist and author Dr. James Comer and Maxine Powell (far left), director of contributions, Kraft General Foods, discuss the "Maggie's American Dream" outreach program with students at Riss Elementary School in Chicago. A donation from Kraft General Foods will help to underwrite the distribution of audiocassettes of "Maggie's American Dream" to 10,000 schools and community groups across the United States.

A Well Tuned Car Is A Pollution Solution

Among the numerous government and consume groups most concerned about air quality is the American Lung Association. Every October, during National Car Care Month, American Lung Association chapters participate in vehicle check lanes to monitor exhaust emissions and safety conditions of the vehicles in their communities.

A pioneer among the sponsoring organizations is the Birmingham Committee for Car Care and Clean Air, consisting of the American Lung Association of Alabama, AAA of Alabama, the Jefferson County Department of Health, the Birmingham Audubon Society and the Birmingham Regional Planning Commission. Using the theme, "A Well Tuned Car is a Pollution Solution," this committee provides consumers with free vehicle safety and emission inspections

plus educational material about preventive maintenance.

At the forefront of this campaign is American Lung Association of Alabama's Executive Director, Jim Hughes, who initiated the check lane program in Birmingham. He reports an overall improvement in vehicle condition since the program started in 1986.

"Last October we inspected 305 vehicles, of which 22 percent failed the emissions test," he says. "While there's plenty of room for improvement, that still represents significant progress over 1986, when 35 percent failed."

We continue to see signs of neglected maintenance," Hughes reports. "Better than one out of four had tire problems and/or low oil level. Belts and hoses also showed lack of attention."

But we're making headway.

According to the Car Care Council, who administer National Car Care Month, owners should become more aware of the signs of deteriorating engine performance. On new cars, with their numerous sensors and com-

This condition also leads to excessive exhaust emissions and polluted atmosphere. These vehicles, the gross polluters, are the target of the National Car CARE Month effort.

As Jim Hughes emphasizes, "Public awareness works. We just have to keep at it."

For a free pamphlet entitled, "The Eight Most Common Signs Your Car Needs a Tune-up," send a business-sized, self-addressed, stamped envelope to Car Care Council, Department T, One Grande Lake Drive, Port Clinton, OH 43452.

Blacks More Prone to Kidney Disease Diabetes: Home Tests Can Help

First, the bad news: Kidney failure strikes African Americans four times more often than Whites. They're twice as likely to get high blood pressure, the number one cause of kidney failure. And they're twice as likely to get high blood pressure, the number one cause of kidney failure. And they're nearly four times more prone to diabetic kidney disease. For years, health groups have urged Blacks to get tested for these high risk diseases, yet the numbers haven't changed much. But there is some hopeful news" now there are inexpensive home health tests available in local pharmacies that detect kidney disease or diabetes and can give Black people an advantage in their fight against these potential killers.

Since the early stages of kidney disease and diabetes are often "silent" with no outward symptoms, regular testing can detect an illness before it becomes more serious and more costly to treat, noted

Dr. Douglas Lind, a Boston health care consultant and internal medicine specialist at St. Elizabeth's Hospital.

For instance, adult onset diabetes (the most common form) caught in the earliest stages can often be regulated with diet and exercise. But if left undiagnosed and untreated, diabetes may lead to blindness, heart disease, amputations, kidney failure and other devastating complications, as well as death, said Lind. This is especially important to Blacks because more than 2.1 million are estimated to have the disease yet only half are diagnosed. Once an African American develops diabetes, they are 3.6 times as likely as Whites to also get kidney disease.

The same goes for kidney disease caused by high blood pressure, said Lind. As many as a quarter of those on dialysis (an artificial kidney machine) started out with slightly high blood

pressure that wasn't treated effectively.

Now people can screen themselves for diabetes and kidney problems with urine tests made by Biotel Corp, that are equal in sensitivity to those used by private physicians and in hospitals, yet cost less than \$1.00 each. The kidney test detects excess protein and microscopic amounts of blood in urine, which often signal a kidney disorder. (Kidneys are filters that clean the blood. When they lose any ability to filter, excess protein winds up in the urine. When kidney tissue is damaged by stones, infection or disease, blood appears in the urine.) The diabetes test detects higher than normal glucose levels, which signal that diabetes may be present.

Accurate and easy-to-use, the tests are done by dipping a test strip into a urine sample, waiting 30 seconds then comparing the color on the strip with a chart on the containers. If the color is in the "not normal" category, the user should call the doctor immediately for early care.

"Since Blacks are a greater risk and the health stakes can be so high, regular self testing can make a huge difference in uncovering kidney disease and diabetes as early as possible," Lind added.

KIDNEY DISEASE & DIABETES: What To Look For, What To Do

Blacks are more likely to get kidney disease and diabetes. Knowing some signs and prevention measures may help avoid a problem or catch it early, said Dr. Douglas D. Lind, a Boston health care consultant and internal medicine specialist at St. Elizabeth's Hospital. He offered the following tips:

Common signs of problems--

- burning during urination, increased frequency of urination
- pudginess around the eyes, swelling hand or feet-pain in lower back or below ribs
- high blood pressure

- weakness
- vomiting, nausea
- blood or protein in the urine

Prevention tips--

- reduce high blood pressure by losing weight if overweight, stop smoking,
- cut back on salt use, get regular exercise, reduce stress
- avoid medications that may damage kidneys (ask your pharmacist or doctor)
- eat less protein in meals
- get early treatment for urinary tract infections, that can travel up to kidneys-regular testing for kidney disorders can be done with a simple, inexpensive home test like Biotel Kidney home screening Test, which detects blood and protein in the urine and can alert you to problems before symptoms appear. If the test is positive, see your doctor immediately for every treatment.

Diabetes: In Type I (insulin dependent) diabetes, the pancreas can't produce insulin. In Type 2 diabetes, insulin is produced, but the body can't use it properly. Untreated diabetes can have devastating complications like blindness, kidney failure heart disease and even death.

Common signs of problems--

- frequent urination
- excessive thirst-extreme tiredness
- unexplained weight loss
- blurry vision
- a parent, brother or sister who has diabetes

Prevention tips--

- lose weight if overweight, follow a healthy diet, get regular exercise-regular testing for diabetes can be done with a simple, inexpensive home test like Biotel Diabetes Home Screening Test, which detects higher than normal amount so blood sugar in the urine and can alert you to problems before symptoms appear. If the test is positive, see your doctor immediately for early treatment.

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African American Orchestrates Nike's Return To South Africa

American international management consultant, Leyland R. Hazlewood, has helped U.S. footwear and leisure apparel giant NIKE International reestablish direct links with South Africa. What makes Nike's comeback interesting is the manner in which they elected to do so. Nike has awarded the distribution and manufacturing rights for South Africa to Odyssey Sports. The Johannesburg company will manufacture Nike's leisurewear, and market and distribute Nike footwear through 400 outlets. This joint-venture was spearheaded by a group of

South African Blacks who negotiated the deal with the assistance of Mr. Hazlewood, Chairman of Dimpex, Inc. an African-American owned company with offices in Johannesburg.

According to the Chairman of Odyssey Sports, Sam Noinyane, last September, he and two other independent Soweto businessmen approached Mr. Hazlewood for assistance in preparing a business plan to submit to Nike. According to Mr. Hazlewood, "In less than a month I helped raise \$3 million, negotiate a joint-venture in South Africa to ensure that the con-

sortium could demonstrate to Nike that it had the financial strength, warehousing, distribution equipment, facilities, knowledge of the products and the trade." The team clinched the deal at Nike's headquarters in Beaverton, Oregon in October.

The Nike collaboration with Soweto businessmen is an alternative model that should help to destroy myths and negative stereotypes that serve to inhibit the true economic empowerment of enterprising Blacks. It also demonstrates how African Americans and Black South Africans can work together.