

# Diabetes: Closer to a Cure

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local participants who demonstrated greater knowledge of their diabetes risk factors and preventative measures.

The AAHC packed a Fremont Street apartment building's community room last month with people who became interested in healthy soul-food cooking through the exercise program.

AAHC president Corliss McKeever described the session as "a free educational seminar that was not heard of seven years ago: first of all in this community, second of all people having an interest in it, so that's the kind of community norm that we've changed around nutrition."

Interest in basic cooking

methods is rising as more and more people receive dietary restrictions from their doctors, according to Jarod Sleet, the Concordia New Seasons Market cooking demonstration manager who wowed people there with his ability to sauté greens and bake apples.

"Being an African American, diabetes has always been an issue for me," Sleet says.

"There was a time when we had to call everyone we know just to fill the room, and now there are waiting lists," McKeever adds. "To have the community moving from not doing anything about it (healthy lifestyles) to being very prevention-focused is a major piece of progress."

Kaiser also tries to affect behavior with a health guide for

African Americans including a "Soul Food Makeover" section, diabetes classes targeting people of color and currently a billboard for the farmers market on Interstate Avenue picturing a crate of cabbages and saying "Rethink Fast Food."

Kaiser's website now recognizes the existence of health disparities as "a tragic problem in the United States — a problem that needlessly kills thousands of people every year."

In studying Kaiser's more than 16,000 diabetics diagnosed in the past decade, the on-site research center has the advantage of a larger, more varied profile.

Researchers there are verifying that the majority of newly diagnosed diabetics heed their doctor's advice to lose weight. A significant proportion also managed to maintain their weight at a level that has been shown to control the symptoms of diabetes.

The results suggest to researchers the efficacy of free nutrition and exercise programs, to which diabetic Kaiser members are automatically referred upon diagnosis. Many doctors previously thought "it would be nice" if diabetics were able to lose weight.

With hope rising for a lifestyle cure to diabetes, barriers to the implementation of viable exercise and nutrition programs remain. Young people, men and people of color are all less likely to lose weight after a diabetes diagnosis in the Kaiser program.

Kaiser researchers are set to recommend that the agency continue to build up its diabetes programming, especially for at-risk groups.

The local black population has a particular stake in finding a solution to this expanding epidemic. African Americans in Multnomah County are 2.4 times more likely to have diabetes as Caucasians, compared to 1.8 times nationwide.

Even though diabetes-prevention programs have proven effective, they can fail to receive adequate financial support.

With a grant expiring next



A promotional picture for Kaiser Permanente's diabetes-support group targets people of color.

month for exercise programs, the AAHC is organizing a benefit walk this Saturday in Dawson Park.

The AAHC also must compete indirectly for financial support with Kaiser and other healthcare providers, which receive diabetes research money through the National Institute of Health.

"We all have to enter the race to develop programs that work, because there's a limited pool of funding," McKeever says.

A competitive atmosphere re-

can prevent people from getting diabetes, even if you have a predisposition."

Kaiser researcher Teresa Hillier headed a 2001 study that linked obesity to the early onset of this most common form of diabetes. She knew then that more lifestyle programs were necessary, and she has long argued that such personal adjustments can be the most effective mechanism at a patient's disposal.

"We need to find effective ways to help people lose weight

*"We're all trying to do the same thing. If you can prevent people from gaining weight, you can prevent people from getting diabetes, even if you have a predisposition."*

— Njeri Karanja, Kaiser nutritionist

mains even though agencies have shared the knowledge of how to combat type-2 diabetes for many years.

"There's never enough funding for these kinds of programs, especially on the public-health level," says Njeri Karanja, a nutritionist from Kenya who is working on other Kaiser studies that link obesity to diabetes.

So far Kaiser has been much more successful in studying the effects with at least eight such studies in progress.

"They're all looking at different angles, but we're all trying to do the same thing," says Karanja. "If you can prevent people from gaining weight, you

in their daily lives," Hillier said. "Finding ways to do this is more than a medical issue. Reducing obesity in America will take hard work and cooperation among everyone -- parents and family members, health care providers, counselors, schools, employers and local, state and federal public-health agencies."

But back in the forgotten building on Northeast Seventh Avenue, Johnson cannot continue to wait for a wide-scale effort to combat diabetes.

"Right now they're just trying to make it as comfortable as possible," he says. "I just really want to get well and get out of here."



PHOTO BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A nondescript building on Northeast Seventh and Hancock reads "Fresenius Medical Care" but is actually Northeast Dialysis Services, a medical facility owned by Diversified Specialty Institutes, which has four dialysis centers in the Portland area, two in northeast.

## The 2007 Skidmore Prize CALL FOR CANDIDATES

The Skidmore Prize honors outstanding young adults (age 35 and under) who devote their full-time work to non-profit organizations within the Portland community. The purpose is to recognize and encourage their long-term commitment and to inspire others.

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Deadline: Midnight, September 4, 2007

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## Dinner and a Movie - Au Naturel

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off.

"I wanted something our community could relate to. Something family-oriented," Stoudamire said. "It's a good summer flic."

Another park that could gain from a bad reputation is Alberta Park.

"I hear Alberta (Park) is not utilized because it brings real thuggish crowds. I object to that. There are sisters and brothers in that neighborhood that would enjoy something like this," Stoudamire said.

He said a long term project for outdoor movies is still in the pilot phase, which is why he has presented packages to sponsors

at different commitment levels ranging from \$75 to \$1,000 plus. He offers sponsors tabling opportunities and advertising in the event schedule and on screen before the movie; even shot outs from the DJ.

"It's all tax deductible," he adds coolly.

Stoudamire hopes to establish a rhythm now and book

several Fridays and Saturdays of next summer with no complications. The six parks he hopes to utilize are Irvington, Peninsula, Fernhill, Overlook, Alberta and of course University.

With the help of the community, Marquise Stoudamire's aspiration may transform into his neighborhoods' inspiration.

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