

HEALTH MATTERS

Aging Elders Present New Problems

BY FRED MILLER

An average male in one of the poorest countries in the world, Bangladesh, has a better chance of reaching the age of 65 than an African American male living in Harlem. Currently the death rate among African Americans is similar to that of European Americans 30 years ago, and low birth weights continue to plague African American mothers.

While overall health in the United States has improved, key health goals among African Americans have remained stagnant or steadily worsened, highlighting the importance of recognizing racism as an important factor to be included in discussions of health disparities.

And this problem may only get worse as the nation's African American population ages, compounding the problems of old age with existing health disparities. The fastest growing segment of the population in the United States are elders 85 years or older. During the last three decades, this group - the oldest old - has doubled in size while the general population increased by about 45 percent. Some estimate that in the next 40 years, older adults aged 85 or more will represent nearly one-fourth of the elderly population and about 5

percent of all Americans.

The elderly African American populations will more than triple between the years 1990 to 2050. Those seniors 85 or older are at the greatest risk for chronic illness, have the most functional dependency on others for caregiving, and have the greatest needs for health and social services.

Another unfortunate aspect of increased aging is an increase in the onset of memory problems such as dementia. Some studies reveal that the prevalence of dementia is almost 50 percent for adults aged 85 and above. Dementia refers to the collection of diseases or conditions that cause global, progressive impairment in several areas of cognitive function including memory. Alzheimer's disease represents 70 percent of the cases of dementia in most industrialized countries and is the fourth most common cause of mortality in older Americans.

To make matters worse, some studies indicate that Alzheimer's disease is more prevalent among African Americans. Low levels of education, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes, common conditions among African American elders, may also be significant risk factors for dementia

and Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's disease tends to have a gradual, slow onset, first affecting memory, but eventually impairing other cognitive abilities such as judgment and insight.

Early treatment can help alleviate some of the memory symptoms, but for too many African Americans, effective treatment is limited because this condition tends to be diagnosed at a later stage.

Currently there are more patients with memory problems in nursing homes in the United States than in all the acute and chronic hospitals combined.

Research is needed to better understand the unique and various needs of African Americans elders is needed if culturally competent services are valued.

While most researchers share the belief that effective treatments for conditions such as Alzheimer's disease are possible within most of our lifetimes. I trust that these effective treatments include the unique psychological and biological functions shared among those of color.

Fred Miller is Director of the African American Dementia & Aging Project at Oregon Health Science University

High Quality & Affordable
Pediatric Primary Healthcare



Children's Community Clinic

27 NE Killingsworth St.
Portland, OR 97211
Phone: (503) 284-5239
Fax: (503) 284-9162

No insurance? No problem. We may be able to help you.
Oregon Health Plan application assistance onsite Tuesdays & Thursdays

\$59*

Excellent Healthcare for Every Child

- General Pediatric Care
- Physicals
- Diabetes & Asthma Diagnosis/Treatment & Management
- Immunizations
- Young Adult Health

Services available for ages: Birth through 21 years
Oregon Board Certified Pediatricians & Providers

*Price for most visits; payment must be made at the time of service.
Lab test fees & prescriptions may be extra.



COUPON Valid 5/1/2010 - 8/31/2010

\$20 off

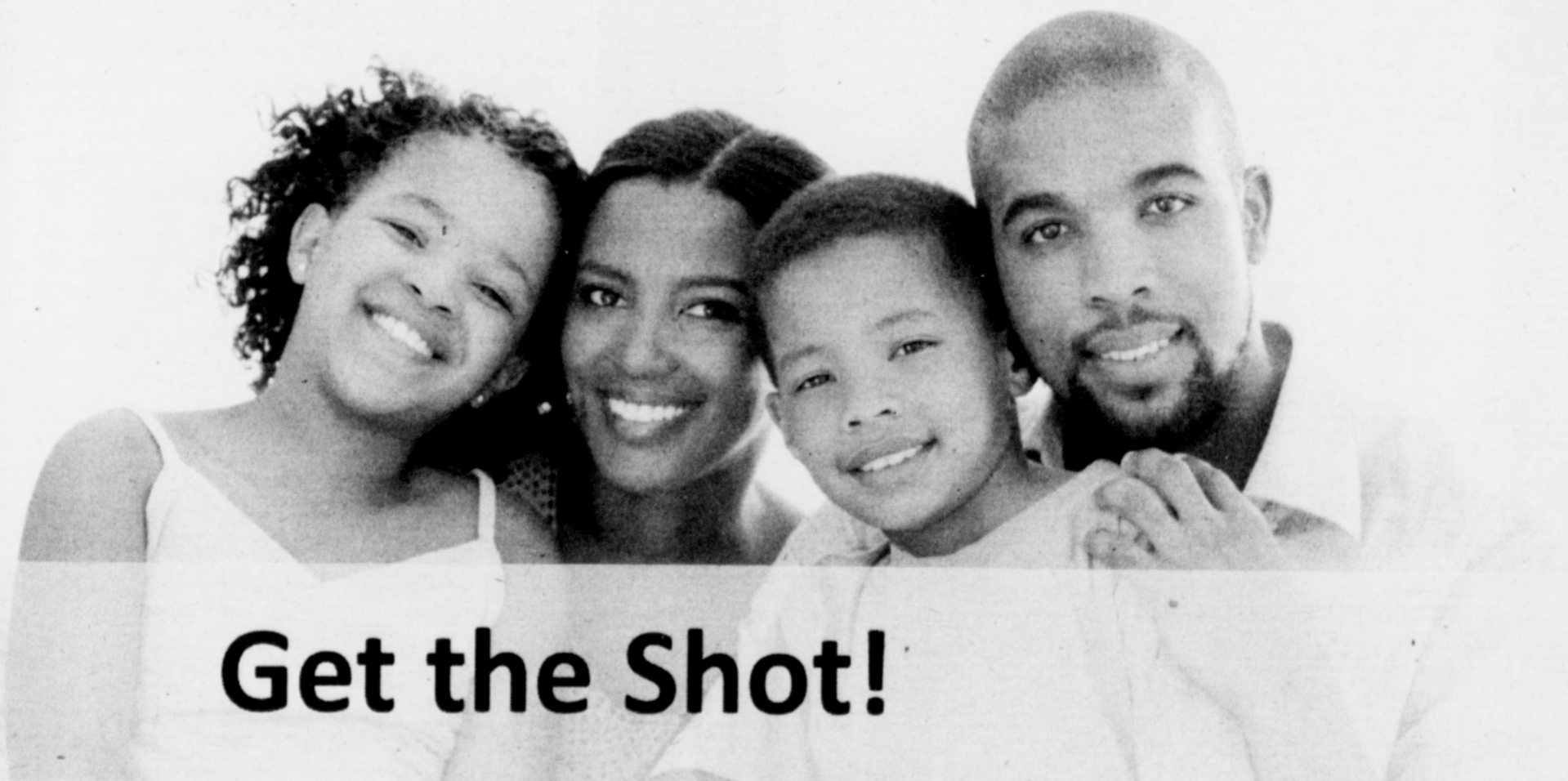
Initial visit payment

PDX004282010 Cash Value = \$0.001

WARNING! H1N1 is still Alive



Let's Keep H1N1 Under Control



Get the Shot!



African American Health Coalition, Inc.

Call 503-413 1850 M-F 8:30AM-5:00PM

Or visit: 2800 N Vancouver Suite 100 Portland, OR 97227

www.aahc-portland.org