



DATE: 11-13-2008

Building Bridges

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

LENGTH: 30 minutes Fighting Cancer and Life and Death



ISSUES INCLUDED BUT NOT LIMITED TO:

Mrs. Gladney's indelible spirit for community affairs has afforded her to work in the political arena for the late Congressman Julian C. Dixon and as well as being appointed a commissioner under Assembly member Mervyn Dymally. For many years, she has extended herself to the community through her local cable talk show, "Building Bridges with Wendy Gladney" which has helped others overcome personal issues in their lives. Wendy is also a featured weekly guest speaker on KJLH 102.3's Front Page with Dominique DiPrima, Friday mornings at 5:00am. Her dedication to the Los Angeles community is exhibited in all that she does, such as producing dynamic events supporting Los Angeles based businesses and venues, being the Event Essentials Editor for Save-the-Date magazine and a contributing writer for the Black Business Association Newspaper.

Wendy Gladney comments:

It's Time To Take Care of Ourselves

This past weekend I met a lovely, dynamic, 45-year-old African American woman at a baby christening. She is a classic example of the mother, sister, wife, girlfriend, superwoman who is well known, respected and indeed, is the backbone of our community. This woman is very well educated, a conservatory trained vocalist and performer, and she is active in her church's music ministry. She is a wife, mother of a teenage son, and a dedicated teacher in the public school system. Upon engaging this woman in conversation it quickly became apparent that this sister who does so much for so many was seriously neglecting her OWN health. She has not had a routine Pap smear in 5 years, nor has she ever had a screening mammogram. She is also overweight and suffers from sleep apnea as a consequence. Medically speaking, she is taking an extreme risk with her life.

Screening for Cervical Cancer Is Important

Major strides have been made in the area of cervical cancer screening, diagnoses and treatment. In short, no woman need ever die of cervical cancer. A simple yearly Pap smear can detect abnormalities in the cells of the cervix that can be easily treated long before they progress to cancer. The average amount of time it takes for abnormal cervical cells to progress to invasive cancer is approximately 5 years. By neglecting to have a Pap smear performed for five consecutive years my friend had clearly put herself at risk for developing advanced cervical cancer and eventually losing her uterus and cervix, or even her life. As gynecologists, we recommend that all women who are sexually active or who have reached 18 years of age should have a yearly Pap smear. If a woman has no history of abnormal Pap smears, and has had normal Pap smears for three consecutive years, she can discuss having less frequent testing with her gynecologist.

Mammograms Help Detect Breast Cancer

Likewise, a mammogram is a simple, painless, five-minute x-ray of the breasts that can in many cases detect breast cancer years before a lump can be felt. It is not sufficient that a woman merely does a monthly self-breast examination. All women should have a baseline screening mammogram between the ages of 35 and 40, followed by yearly mammograms after age 40. This screening process should begin earlier in patients with a family history of breast cancer. Though breast cancer is more common in Caucasian women, African-American women are much more likely to die from it than White women are. This is simply because in women of color, the cancer tends to be diagnosed after it has already spread and is no longer "curable". Similarly African American women are over represented in the number of women who die of cervical, uterine and ovarian and colon cancer.

To further illustrate this point, my 63-year-old mother was diagnosed with early invasive breast cancer by a routine screening mammogram only 2 months ago. At that time, there was absolutely NO LUMP to be felt in her breast. She subsequently had surgery in which the cancerous area, along with some sample lymph nodes, was removed. Because the cancer was detected early, it had not yet spread beyond a small area of the breast or to the lymph nodes. Consequently, her breast was saved, she does not have to undergo chemotherapy, and her chances of a complete cure are great. Although she has no family history of breast cancer, my Mother religiously goes for her yearly mammograms. Last year's mammogram results were completely normal, yet one year later she had developed invasive cancer! Had she been lax and missed her yearly mammogram, the chances are high the cancer would have spread throughout her body by year 2002, ultimately resulting in death.

Colon Cancer Screening

There is also the matter of colon cancer in women. The screening test for early detection of this potentially fatal disease consists of testing a woman's stool sample for blood on a yearly basis. At age 50 a baseline flexible sigmoidoscopy should be obtained. This is an exam that may be done in the doctor's office that consists of using a scope to look in the rectum and colon from below, in order to find abnormalities, polyps or other potentially cancerous growths. If this test is normal it should be repeated every three years.

Other Health Matters of Concern

There are numerous other areas where simple screening tests and modification of risk factors can dramatically improve the health status of African American women. Getting screened for high cholesterol, thyroid disease, high blood pressure, depression, diabetes and osteoporosis are simple interventions that may save lives. Likewise smoking cessation, a healthier diet, modest weight loss, regular exercise and routine prenatal care all stand to make a huge impact on the quality of life and overall health of sisters.

HEALTH INFORMATION:

FIGHTING CANCER AND OTHER DISEASE LIKE AIDS CAN BE HELPED BY IMPROVING OUR DIET.

We live in an era where unprecedented advancements in medical technology are unfolding right before our very eyes. As we enter the new millenium, the human genetic code has been literally "cracked". Many forms of cancer are now curable and human fetuses can have defects surgically corrected while still in the uterus. In such an era, why is it that we as people of color in general, specifically women of color still suffer disproportionately from diseases and conditions that have long since been deemed preventable, treatable and/or curable if diagnosed early by simple, widely available screening tests?

In general these treatable conditions are diagnosed at a latter stage in which the disease process is more advanced in women of color. By the time one has finally gone to a physician and been diagnosed, the condition has often progressed well beyond the point where it is easily treatable. As women of color and the keepers of future generations, it is crucial that we don't get so caught up in our roles as wives, mothers, community activists, career women etc., that we continue to neglect our health to the detriment of not only ourselves, but also our communities. If we don't take the time out to care for ourselves, who will?

I don't profess to have all the answers to the above problems and indeed that is not the purpose of this column. What I do hope to accomplish is to revisit some of the aforementioned issues in greater detail and tackle new issues. I also hope to establish an open dialog between the members of BlackWomensHealth.com and myself whereby the exchange of information and discussion about topics, vital to the health of women of color can take place. I welcome your suggestions and comments. Please feel free to email me at: andi@womenofcolorobgyn.com.

No single food or food substances can protect you against cancer. But scientists believe that the right combination of foods in a predominantly plant-based diet may. Evidence is mounting that the minerals, vitamins and phytochemicals in plant foods interact to provide extra cancer protection. This concept is called **synergy**.

In addition, vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans are low-energy-dense, low calorie foods and probably protect against weight gain. According to the Second Expert Report, experts believe that weight gain – particularly obesity and overweight – are implicated in the development of cancer. Eating a predominantly plant based diet can **help prevent weight gain** and therefore protect against those cancers whose risk is convincingly increased by higher body fat (namely cancers of the colorectum, esophagus, endometrium, pancreas, kidney, and breast in postmenopausal women).

At least 2/3 of your plate should be filled with vegetables, fruit, whole grains and beans.

The majority of the *laboratory research* on diet and cancer suggests that eating vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans will lower your risk of developing the disease. Scientists are trying to determine precisely how and why these foods may prevent or stop the development of tumors.

Beans, Berries, Cruciferous Vegetables, Dark Green Leafy Vegetables, Flaxseed, Garlic, Grapes and Grape Juice, Green Tea, Soy, Tomatoes, Whole Grains are all foods that protect your health.

