

# Know the Health Facts

## Diabetes

Diabetes affects nearly 6 percent of the total US population. It kills more than 400,000 U.S. residents each year. Death rate are two times higher in the African-American population than among Whites. It is the leading cause of blindness in 20-to 74-year-olds. There are approximately 800,000 new diagnosed cases every year.

## Cancer

Cancer disproportionately affects African Americans with respect to nearly every major cancer type in both sexes. Tobacco use, particularly cigarette smoking, is the single most important cause of cancer.

## Strokes and Cardiovascular Disease

African-American men and women have the highest prevalence of strokes and cardiovascular disease in the United States. African Americans living in the southeastern region of the nation have a higher mortality rate from strokes than their White counterparts.

## HIV/AIDS

Although Blacks only make up 13 percent of the population in this country, they comprise roughly 34 percent of the nearly 800,000 reported AIDS cases. Between June 2000 and July 2001, Black men and women made up 47 percent of the cases reported and Black women represented 64 percent of the AIDS cases that were reported for women.

## Mental Health

According to the U.S. Surgeon General's Report of 1999 and the World Health Organization Reports of 1996 and 2001, mental health disorders are prevalent in this society and often times are disabling. African Americans and other minorities within the United States are disproportionately affected with mental illness.

Source: Center of Excellence on Health Disparities Morehouse School of Medicine

## Satcher

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- **Midstream**-Making a community a health conducive environment such as the availability of walking trails and biking trails. Ensuring schools implement physical activity and good nutrition.
- **Upstream**-The impact of government policies to address issues such as 47 percent of the U.S. population being uninsured. Satcher emphasizes the importance of a major focus on health care systems.

Satcher's passion about the mortality rates of African Americans is rooted in personal experiences. As a child on a farm in Anniston, Ala., he was expected at the age of 2 of whooping cough. Two of his siblings died due to lack of health care. Now it's Satcher's mission to ensure Black men live long enough to teach their grandchildren to fish and involve them in other priceless activities. "There's no substitute for grandparents, and many of our [Black] children will never have that," he said.

Surprisingly, one of the best health systems is not available to most Black men. Satcher illustrates that Medicaid is much more likely to be used by Black women since 62 percent of African American births are covered by Medicaid. Men who are neither elderly nor disabled don't qualify for Medicaid, and many Black men don't live long enough to take advantage of the program.

Satcher finally closed his book of data and said, "The bottom line is that every

year about 85,000 Blacks die who would not die if we had the same mortality rates as Whites. Every week, we estimate 100 African American babies die who would not die if we have the same infant mortality rate as Whites.

"Bush has used that [mortality rate] in trying to sell his Social Security [revision plan]. You heard what he said? This would be good for Black people 'cause many of them don't even live long enough to get it.' He tried to get the Black Caucus to support his Social Security effort, and he was basing it on the fact the since Black people die younger, they don't get the same benefits from Social Security because they're not around. And he's right about that, but we just don't believe his plan is a solution. We ought to keep reminding him that lower life expectancy is a problem he ought to be devoted to solving."

Black men have seen a gradual decrease in their mortality rate however, Black women have seen a drastic decrease in mortality rates as well as increased health awareness. Not only are Black women healthier, they're living longer than Black men. When asked about the consequences of this, Satcher is quick to give the painful prognosis. "More Black women are going to be widows," he said. "There's no question that Black women suffer severely. I think that Black women recognized this and tried to provide some of the leadership with some of these issues."

Some say it's not surprising that some

Blacks are skeptical when it comes to medical treatment. They, after all were the subjects in the Tuskegee experiment, in which Black men in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century who believed they were receiving health care from the federal government were, in fact, being used in an experiment. So who has the best interests of Black men at heart? Satcher said, "You should ask who has the best information and then whom can we trust? They are not always the same people. That's why we need more Black health care professionals." Satcher points to the MSM as not only an academic institution but also a resource for the community. "We need to get more diversity in the health profession so that Black men can point to people and say, 'I trust that guy to tell me the truth, and I realize he knows what he's talking about.'"

What does it take to get Black men to change their lifestyles? Satcher says given the opportunity to sit in the living room of every Black man, he would simply educate men on health, motivate them to act on the information and mobilize the community to take part in the movement.

Dr. Satcher rises from a long conference table and takes a position near his desk preparing for another meeting. Of course not far away is his plastic bottle now half empty. He finally reveals his own personal tonic to get himself through the day and keep the doctor away—apple cinnamon spice tea, no sugar.