

Action Summit Targets Racial Disparities in Health

The Bronx Health REACH coalition to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health held a **Call to Action Summit** on April 28 at the **Walker Memorial Baptist Church**. Bronx Health REACH is a coalition of community organizations, social service agencies and health care providers, as well as 14 Bronx churches that participated in the event. Over 600 local residents heard speakers discuss the challenges faced by people of color when seeking to attain health equality. **In the speakers own words:**



Imani Ma'at, EdD, speaks at the Bronx Health REACH Action Summit.

Imani Ma'at, EdD, Director, REACH 2010, Centers for Disease Control

"I'm tired of going to funerals. I'm tired of hearing about one more person who had a touch of diabetes; one more person who had a heart attack or a stroke. We can control this."

Rev. Robert L. Foley, Sr., Pastor, Cosmopolitan Church of the Lord Jesus

"The church is strategically situated to communicate health messages of importance and also to heighten the awareness of our friends and neighbors and constituents regarding the absence of fair and equitable delivery of health services to our communities. We must be foot soldiers for medical justice. Remember, the only thing needed for evil to triumph is for good people to simply sit and do nothing."

Charmaine Ruddock, MS, Project Leader, Bronx Health REACH

"Bronx Health REACH is part of a national movement. We are working with community residents; we are working with health care providers; and we are working with government officials. We are teaching community residents what to expect of the health care system and how to manage the diseases that our parents, our children, our sisters and our

brothers are facing daily.

We are in the business of educating providers on how to be sensitive and communicate effectively with the patients that they see. To do this, we have developed a provider training program that's reaching out to medical students, doctors, health care administrators — even people at the front desk.

"This is not just a project with a definitive lifetime but, in fact, a movement to make sure that health care is equal for all of us."

Neil Calman, MD, President, The Institute for Urban Family Health

"If you go into a hospital today, and you find a black baby and a white baby sleeping side-by-side, the black male baby will live 8 years less; for a female baby, it's 7 years less. So, starting out, people are born into a system that is not going to offer them the same health care outcomes. No, I don't think this means that doctors intentionally try to hurt people of color; but we grow up in the same society full of prejudices and full of race issues that everybody else grows up in.

"You can't have a health care system where race is not an issue if race is an issue everywhere in our society. Race is a factor in the way that doctors take care of their patients. We also are trained in institutions that do not give the same quality of care to everyone who comes in their doors.

"In almost every hospital in New York, we find that when black people or Latino people go to the emergency room with heart problems, they are less likely to have advanced

procedures that they need to enable them to live a normal life.

"And in our biggest and most famous institutions in New York City, where we have the best doctors for everything, if you have Medicaid or you're uninsured, you get sent to the clinics, [where you get seen by a different medical student or resident each time]; and if you have private insurance, you get sent to the Faculty Practice where you are seen by the professors. And that they call an equal system of care.

"The REACH coalition is working with the United States Office of Civil Rights, working with the State Attorney General's office, and working with the Department of Health to see that civil rights laws that apply to equal access for people of color in this society work for people the same way when they go for health care. Because, right now they do not."

Rev. Dr. J. Albert Bush, Sr., Pastor, Walker Memorial Baptist Church

"Stop telling yourself that there is no such thing as racism in America. There are disparities in education; there are disparities in mortgaging; there are disparities in health. And you can't begin to eliminate a problem until you confess that the problem exists.

"We don't need any more questioning about whether there are disparities. And if you don't believe it, try being black and poor.

"Eliminate this two-tiered health system. Tell people down from the Borough President's office to City Hall, from City Hall to Albany, all the way to the State Senate, to the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Senate: if we are good enough to elect men and women to office and give them health insurance — every single public official gets health insurance — and if we are good enough to give it to them, they ought to be decent enough to give it to the rest of us."