

National African American Outreach Program



Promoting A Healthier
African American
Community

PAF Patient Advocate
Foundation

Solving Insurance and Healthcare Access Problems | since 1996

Patient Advocate Foundation Mission Statement

Patient Advocate Foundation is a national non-profit organization that serves as an active liaison between the patient and their insurer, employer and/or creditors to resolve insurance, job discrimination and/or debt crisis matters relative to their diagnosis through professional case managers, doctors and attorneys. Patient Advocate Foundation seeks to safeguard patients through effective mediation assuring access to care, maintenance of employment, and preservation of their financial stability.

Patient Advocate Foundation National African American Outreach Program Mission Statement

The PAF National African American Outreach Program (NAAOP) is designed to reduce health-care disparities and assist clients in obtaining a better quality of life within disenfranchised communities by disseminating information to those who are generally unable to receive reliable healthcare. The program targets high risk health areas such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, kidney failure, stroke, along with specific types of cancer: breast, cervical, lung, colorectal and prostate. NAAOP seeks to ensure the patient's rights to adequate health-care and their empowerment to improve the quality of life in the African American community.

Co-Pay Relief Mission Statement

Patient Advocate Foundation's Co-Pay Relief (PAF CPR) provides co-payment assistance for pharmaceutical products to insured Americans who financially and medically qualify. PAF CPR provides direct financial assistance to qualified patients to assist them in the ability to afford the co-payments their insurance requires. The Program offers personal service to all patients through the use of CPR call counselors.

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INTRODUCTION

Current research shows an alarming increase in health problems among minority populations. More specifically, the African American community faces more health challenges due to the higher than normal incidence of diseases, with most prevalent being heart, kidney, and sickle cell disease. This publication provides a short description of each disease, suggestions for prevention and identifies resources available.

Many experts believe that African Americans have an inherited tendency to develop these diseases. Risk factors such as age, gender and family history cannot be changed, which is why it is important to control the risk factors that you can such as:

- Smoking
- Diet
- High salt intake
- Lifestyle
- Weight
- Alcohol intake
- Chronic health conditions
such as diabetes, cholesterol
and high blood pressure

Heart and Kidney Disease

Heart and kidney diseases include coronary artery disease, heart attacks, stroke, high blood pressure (hypertension) and kidney disease. These diseases are common in the African American community and are major causes of early death.

Hypertension (High Blood Pressure) is a silent killer and occurs when the pressure of blood against the walls of the blood vessels increases. Poorly controlled high blood pressure is a leading cause of chronic kidney disease, heart attacks and strokes. High blood pressure can be treated effectively with medicines, diet and a healthy lifestyle.

Stroke

Strokes result when a blood vessel that carries oxygen and nutrients to the brain is either blocked by a clot or bursts. Then part of the brain starts to die because it cannot get the blood and oxygen it needs. When a portion of the brain dies the area of the body it controls is affected. Strokes can cause a complete or partial loss of movement or sensation, affect speech or vision. Side effects of a stroke may be permanent or temporary and will be different with each patient. Recovery is dependent on the severity of the stroke, location of the blood clot, and how soon treatment is received.

Signs and Symptoms:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

Heart Attack

Heart Attacks occur when the blood supply to a section of the heart muscle is severely reduced or completely stopped. The reduction or stoppage happens when one or more of the coronary arteries supplying blood to the heart muscle is blocked. If the blood and oxygen supply is cut off for more than a few minutes, heart muscle cells suffer permanent injury and die. This can kill or disable someone, depending on how much heart muscle is damaged.

Signs and Symptoms:

- Discomfort or mild pain in the center of the chest. The pain can come and go and is often described as pressure, squeezing, indigestion or simply as pain
- Pain can spread to one or both arms, neck, jaw, back or stomach
- Shortness of breath, sweating, dizziness or nausea
- Denial is a common response to chest pain

If you experience any of these symptoms or have risk factors for heart disease, do not ignore them. Women are known to have symptoms that are not “typical” for a heart attack, but this does not mean that women should ignore their symptoms.

Risk Factors:

- Family history
- Smoking
- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Physical inactivity
- Overweight and obesity
- Excessive alcohol intake
- Diabetes
- Stress

New treatments are available for heart attack and stroke victims. It is important that you do not delay seeking medical care when symptoms appear, since treatment must be given as soon as possible to be effective. Every second counts!

Kidney Disease

Chronic kidney disease has two main causes: diabetes and high blood pressure. Chronic kidney disease may progress slowly and many people do not know they have kidney disease until it is already severe. If found and treated early, kidney disease can often be slowed or stopped. If not stopped, it may lead to kidney failure. Kidney failure means your kidneys no longer work well enough to maintain life and you will either need dialysis or a kidney transplant.

Risk factors:

- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Family history of chronic kidney disease
- Older Age

Signs and Symptoms:

- Fatigue
- Trouble thinking clearly
- Poor appetite

- Trouble sleeping
- Dry, itchy skin
- Muscle cramping at night
- Swollen feet and ankles
- Puffiness around the eyes, especially in the morning
- Need to urinate more often, especially at night

Diabetes

Diabetes is a condition where one is unable to control blood sugar. Problems can occur if blood sugar is too high or too low. Diabetes occurs when the body is either unable to make enough insulin or it becomes unable to use the amount of insulin produced. Uncontrolled blood sugar leads to a number of damaging conditions of the body. There are two main types of diabetes.

Type I or “juvenile-onset” usually begins during childhood or early adulthood. The body does not produce enough insulin and the patient must give themselves shots of insulin.

Type II diabetes is also called “adult-onset” or “non-insulin dependent” diabetes. It is usually associated with being overweight and has a tendency to run in families. Usually the body makes enough insulin, but cannot use it properly.

African Americans experience higher rates of complications of diabetes: cardiovascular diseases, blindness, amputation of limbs and kidney failure. Becoming educated about the symptoms, treatments and preventions will go a long way to prevent the development of diabetes or maintain control of this condition.

Signs and Symptoms:

- Increased thirst
- Increased urination
- Increased hunger
- Feeling more tired
- Loss of weight
- Blurry vision

Risk Factors:

- Overweight and obesity
- Age
- Family History
- History of having a large birth weight baby (over 9 lbs)
- Low physical activity

Prevention/Best Defense:

Type I diabetes cannot be prevented since this condition is usually linked to a family history.

Type II diabetes cannot always be prevented, however a healthy diet and regular exercise can lower the risk of developing this condition.

Education is the single most important factor in preventing complications.

IF YOU HAVE DIABETES:

- See your doctor regularly
- Check your blood sugar as recommended
- Follow your diet
- Have your blood pressure checked often
- Take all prescribed medicines as ordered
- Don't smoke
- Limit alcohol intake
- Exercise regularly

CANCERS

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in African Americans. Advances in early detection, screening and treatment have reduced cancer incidence and mortality, improved life expectancy and enhanced the quality of life for many cancer patients. However, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), when compared with other ethnic groups, African Americans are significantly more likely to develop cancer and subsequently die from their disease. The most common forms of cancers in African Americans are lung, breast, cervical, prostate, and colorectal.

Breast Cancer

Breast Cancer is the most common cancer found among African American women and the second leading cause of cancer death for

women. African American women are usually diagnosed at a younger age, the cancer is more aggressive and is often in an advanced stage at diagnosis. Most people consider breast cancer strictly a women's disease, but men are also at risk of developing breast cancer.

The fear factor often causes African Americans to delay medical screening or ignore breast lumps found during self breast exams. Myths about cancer, social stigma, denial, poverty, and lack of health insurance also contribute to delays in access to care and treatment.

Signs and Symptoms:

- A lump is detected, which is usually firm and most often painless
- A portion of the skin on the breast or underarm swells and has an unusual appearance
- Veins on the skin's surface become more prominent on one breast
- The breast nipple can become inverted, develop a rash, change skin texture, or have a discharge other than breast milk
- A depression is found in an area of the breast surface

Women's breasts can develop some degree of lumpiness, but only a small percentage of lumps are found to be cancer.

While African Americans are less likely to develop breast cancer than other ethnic groups, they are more likely to experience delays in diagnosis and treatment. Income, lack of health insurance and no access to screening account for some but not all of the delays. In other words, many African Americans wait too long to seek treatment. A majority of breast cancer cases occur in women with no identifiable risks and often have no symptoms. Some factors cannot be controlled such as age, gender, personal and family history, and early menopause.

Risk factors:

- Lack of cancer screening and follow up of abnormal results
- Physical inactivity

- Diet and nutrition
- Overweight and obesity
- Excessive alcohol use
- Smoking
- Not having children or having first child after age 30
- Radiation Therapy to the chest or upper body to treat Hodgkin's Disease, Thyroid conditions or other cancers
- Environmental factors

Prevention/Best Defense:

- Personalized risk assessment
- Early screening - Annual mammography should begin at age 40 (or as directed by a medical professional) and then as recommended
- Annual clinical breast exam by medical professional beginning at age 20
- Monthly self breast exam

Lung Cancer

Lung Cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in the United States. It is the second most common cancer among African American men and women. African Americans are more likely to develop and die from lung cancer than persons of any other racial or ethnic group. Most lung cancers are caused by tobacco use. The reason for higher lung cancer incidence rates among African Americans remains unclear, but racial differences in smoking habits, a tendency to smoke menthol cigarettes, genetics (how the body processes tobacco) and other factors such as diet, occupation, socioeconomic status and delays in access to care and treatment, may all play an important role.

Signs and Symptoms:

- Persistent cough
- Constant chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Hoarseness
- Recurring pneumonia or bronchitis
- Coughing up blood
- Fatigue
- Swelling and redness of the neck or face
- Loss of appetite and loss of weight

If you have any of these symptoms longer than two weeks, see your health care provider right away. These symptoms could be the first warning of a lung cancer. Many of these symptoms can also result from other causes. You need to be evaluated to determine the cause of your symptoms.

Risk Factors:

- Cigarette smoking
- Prolonged exposure to second-hand smoke
- Occupations with exposure to hazardous agents like arsenic, radon and asbestos
- Exposure to chemical products
- Radiation exposure
- Exposure to air pollution
- Tuberculosis

Prevention/Best Defense:

- If you don't smoke, don't start
- If you do smoke, quit. Quitting smoking decreases the risk of lung and other cancers, heart attack, stroke and chronic lung disease
- Avoid second hand smoke if at all possible
- Never expose children to second-hand smoke
- Prolonged exposure can interfere with normal lung development and increases the risk of developing respiratory illnesses such as asthma
- In the workplace, follow work and safety guidelines to reduce your exposure to hazardous chemicals and second hand smoke

Prostate Cancer

Prostate Cancer is the most common cancer found in African American men and is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in African American men. Prostate cancer is the fourth leading cause of death among African American men over age 45. African American men have higher rates of being diagnosed and dying from prostate cancer than men of other racial or ethnic groups in the United States. This may be due to in part to cultural, environmental factors and the biology of the disease in African American men.

Signs and Symptoms:

Many men with prostate cancer often have no symptoms. If symptoms do appear, they can include:

- Blood in urine
- Need to urinate frequently, especially at night
- Weak or interrupted urine flow
- Pain or burning feeling while urinating
- The inability to urinate
- Constant pain in lower back, pelvis or upper thighs

Risk Factors:

- Family History
- Chance of being diagnosed increases with age
- Diet high in animal fats

Prevention/Best Defense:

- Annual medical exam beginning at age 45 to include digital rectal exam
- Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) blood test beginning at age 50 (unless you are in a high risk category) or as recommended by your health care professional

Colorectal Cancer

Colon and rectal cancer is the third most common cancer among African Americans. The number of African Americans diagnosed and dying from advanced stage colorectal cancer is higher than other population groups in the United States. The reason for this may be due to the fact that African Americans are less likely to undergo screening exams and are then more likely to be diagnosed in advanced stages, leaving fewer treatment options available to them. Colorectal cancer is highly preventable and is curable when caught early. Most cases of the disease begin as non-cancerous polyps, which are grape like growths lining the colon and rectum. These polyps can become cancerous. Removing the polyps can prevent colorectal cancer from ever developing.

Symptoms:

- Rectal bleeding

- Blood in or on the stool (bright red)
- Change in bowel habits
- Stools that are narrower than usual
- General stomach discomfort (bloating, fullness and/or cramps)
- Diarrhea, constipation or feeling that the bowel does not empty completely
- Frequent gas pains
- Weight loss for no apparent reason
- Constant tiredness
- Vomiting

If you have any of these symptoms for more than two weeks, see your health care professional immediately. These symptoms may be caused by several other conditions. You need to be evaluated to determine the cause of your symptoms.

Risk Factors:

- Personal or family history of colon cancer or polyps
- Personal or family history of inflammatory bowel disease (colitis or Crohn's disease)
- Lack of fiber in the diet
- Age

Prevention/Best Defense:

- Diet high in fiber, fruits and vegetables
- Increased fluid intake of non-alcoholic beverages
- Screening tests beginning at age 50 (unless at high risk) or as indicated by a medical professional
- Limit intake of red meat to once a day

Cervical Cancer

Cervical Cancer is the fourth most common type of cancer in African American women and is the fifth leading cause of cancer death. This is due to inadequate screening, delayed diagnosis and lack of access to care. Although cervical cancer most often affects young women, many women do not realize that the risk of developing cervical cancer is still present as they age. It is important to continue having regular Pap tests at least until age 70 and possibly longer.

Signs and Symptoms:

Early cervical cancer usually has no symptoms. A woman usually develops symptoms when the cancer has spread. Such symptoms may include:

- Unusual vaginal discharge or drainage
- Bleeding or spotting
- Painful sex

All of these signs and symptoms can be caused by conditions other than cervical cancer. If you have any of the above symptoms, you should see your health care professional right away. Ignoring these symptoms may allow the cancer to progress and lower the chance of survival.

Risk Factors:

- Early sexual activity
- Multiple sexual partners
- History of sexually transmitted diseases
- History of Human papilloma virus (HPV)
- Age

Prevention/Best Defense:

- Avoid risk factors
- Use of condoms
- Annual pelvic exams with Pap smear beginning at age 18 (earlier if sexually active)

Breast and cervical cancer screening is now more readily available to medically underserved women through the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBC-CEDP). This program provides early breast and cervical cancer detection testing to women without health insurance for free or at very little cost. Contact the Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program at 1-888-842-6355 or contact your State Department of Health for information on how to contact the nearest program participant.

Sickle Cell Disease

Sickle cell anemia is a disease passed down through families. The red blood cells are an abnormal crescent shape instead of being normally shaped like a disc. The crescent shaped

red blood cells have difficulty passing through small blood vessels. When sickle-shaped cells block small blood vessels, less blood can reach that part of the body. Tissue that does not receive a normal blood flow eventually becomes damaged. This is what causes the complications of sickle cell disease. Blocked blood vessels and damaged organs can cause sudden painful episodes or crisis.

Sickle cell disease affects approximately one out of every 500 African Americans. Although sickle cell disease is present at birth, symptoms usually don't occur until after 4 months of age. Sickle cell anemia may become life threatening. There is currently no universal cure for sickle cell disease.

Signs and Symptoms:

- Attacks of Stomach Pain
- Bone Pain
- Difficulty Breathing
- Delayed Growth
- Fever
- Jaundice (yellow color to the skin)
- Paleness
- Fast Heart Rate
- Frequent Infections
- Leg Sores

Some people with the disease experience minor, brief, and infrequent episodes. Others experience severe, long lasting, and frequent episodes resulting in many complications.

Risk Factors:

Sickle cell anemia can only result when two carriers with the sickle cell trait have a child together. A person with sickle cell trait inherits some of the genes of sickle cell disease, but does not develop symptoms. People with sickle cell trait rarely have symptoms due to the condition because they also have some normal red blood cells. However, they can pass the sickle cell trait to their children. Genetic counseling is recommended for all carriers of the sickle cell trait before they have children. In the United States sickle cell anemia most commonly affects African Americans and Hispanics. About 1 in 12 African Americans has sickle cell trait.

Prevention/Best Defense:

Taking steps to stay healthy is critical for anyone with sickle cell anemia. Staying healthy prevents crises and the complications of sickle cell disease.

- Eat healthy
- Get enough rest
- Protect yourself from infections
- Infants and children need regular childhood shots and doctor visits
- Moderate physical activity
- Regular checkups with your doctor
- Treat infections immediately
- Drink plenty of fluids

Conclusion

In summary, research shows that most diseases impacting the African American community can be controlled and/or prevented by:

- Maintaining a healthy lifestyle
- Exercising regularly
- Seeking regular medical exams and screenings
- Increasing early detection of illness
- Patient education

Understanding your condition and how to manage it can increase your confidence in making changes to improve and maintain your health. Any serious illness can raise important financial and emotional concerns for both the patient and their family. Familiarize yourself with your health insurance plan by getting a copy of the policy and reading it over so you know the coverage and benefits available to you. If necessary, seek financial assistance or guidance through national or local organizations and assistance programs. For instance, the Patient Advocate Foundation, the American Heart Association, prescription assistance, Federal, State and local Human Services programs can offer help. The most important thing to remember is that you are not alone. These diseases are manageable and there are many people and organizations that care and are available to assist you.

**PROMOTING A HEALTHIER
AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY**

REFERENCES

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www.cancer.org
- American Diabetes Association
www.diabetes.org
- American Heart Association
www.americanheart.org
- Cancer Epidemiology Biomarkers & Prevention
www.cedp.aacrjournals.org
- Cancer Research and Prevention Foundation
www.preventcancer.org
- Centers for Disease Control
www.cdc.gov
- Colorectal Cancer Network
www.colorectal-cancer.net
- Medline Plus Medical Encyclopedia
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus
- National Breast and Cervical Cancer
Early Detection Program,
www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp
- National Cancer Institute
www.cancer.gov/
- National Kidney Disease Education Program
www.nkdep.nih.gov
- National Ovarian Cancer Coalition
www.ovarian.org
- Oncology channel
www.oncologychannel.com
- Patient Advocate Foundation
www.patientadvocate.org
- Sickle Cell Disease Organization of America
www.sicklecelldisease.org
- Sisters Network Inc...Stop the Silence
www.sistersnetworkinc.org
- US TOO (prostate resource)
www.ustoo.org

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Co-Pay Relief: A Patient Assistance Program
www.copays.org 1-866-512-3861
- Needy Meds
www.Needymeds.com
- Lupus Foundation of America
www.lupus.org
- Cancer Care
www.cancercare.org
- Lance Armstrong Foundation
www.livestrong.org

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