

Tracy Nelson

Diabetes

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The Sour Side of Sugar: Education Leads to Diabetic Prevention

Marnyce McKell, an African American woman, knew her family's health history included diabetes. But until one Saturday morning in October, she had no idea that her family's history would become a part of her current lifestyle.

While attending a seminar on diabetes in October, McKell discovered that she had diabetes.

"I used to get checked every year, but a lot of things have changed," said McKell, who is currently going through menopause. "My body has changed. [People] get the basic information from their doctor, but not enough so that when complications occur you know what's wrong."

McKell is one of 17 million African Americans suffering from diabetes. But the difference between her and them is that she understands her condition and now she can take the steps toward getting her disease under control.

During the seminar, "Sugar Ain't Sweet," McKell, and more than 30 other men and women, heard from three experts in the field of health education speaking on the topic of diabetes. The Shiloh Church of God in Christ hosted the event through the support of F-BACH (Faith-Based Approach to Community Health) and the San Diego Black Health Associates (SDBHA).

The seminar allowed for the guest speakers to dive deeper into the issue of diabetes and its severity.

Bill Releford, Jr., a diabetic foot/wound care specialist, was one of the guest speakers at the event. He focused on the danger of amputations due to diabetic complications and used graphic photos and stories from his patients to help the audience realize the severity of the disease if gone untreated.

“If Jerry Springer can be graphic, why can’t I?” he said. “My message is more important than his. People are either motivated by inspiration or desperation.”

African Americans are two-thirds more likely to undergo leg amputation due to diabetic-related complications and it’s the fourth leading cause of death amongst African Americans.

SDBHA is not the only organization in San Diego promoting minority health awareness. Many programs are in place that target minority groups living with diabetes.

The Council of Community Clinics’ mission is to support the San Diego community clinics, said Kim Thomas, the project coordinator. They provide training to clinic providers and education classes at the clinics for patients with diabetes.

“We want care to be delivered in a culturally competent way,” said Thomas.

The Council of Community Clinics collaborates with Project Dulce, the Community Health Improvement Partners (CHIP) and the Whittier Institute for Diabetes.

All of the programs were created to reach those living with diabetes who have low incomes and are not insured.

According to Jane Czech, director of Project Dulce, the program is “not segmented.” She explained that Project Dulce offers services to a wide variety of minority groups.

“Diabetes doesn’t come by itself, it comes in combinations,” said Aurelia Stephens, a registered nurse at the Scripps Whittier Diabetes Institute. “You have to take control of it.”

Stephens, who spoke at the diabetic seminar, works with diabetic patients daily and educates them about the life-threatening disease. Without treatment, diabetes can lead to more dangerous problems like high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

What most people don’t realize is that diabetes can be controlled.

With exercise and appropriate diet, it is possible to keep diabetes in check and still live a long and healthy life.

“You have to learn to take control of it,” said Stephens. “Just move. Any activity will do.”

McKell felt very fortunate to be at the seminar and hopes that others learned as much as she did.

“The more education you get, the more prevention there’ll be,” she said.

For more information about the diabetic organizations mentioned, go to the Scripps Web site at www.scrippshealthfoundation.org.

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