

*Sidney McNairy, Jr., PhD, DSc; Director of Research Infrastructure; National Center for Research Resources; National Institutes of Health*

On behalf of the Division of Research Infrastructure in the National Center for Research Resources at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), let me congratulate the members of the Research Centers in Minority Institutions (RCMI) Community for moving forward with this most timely supplement highlighting some of the remarkable achievements of the 9th RCMI International Symposium on Health Disparities sponsored by the National Center for Research Resources. I would also like to congratulate and thank Drs. Joan Robinson and Juarine Stewart, as well as all of their colleagues at Morgan State University, for their tireless efforts in orchestrating and hosting this 9th RCMI International Symposium held on December 8–11, 2004 in Baltimore, Maryland.

This bi-annual conference that brings together a wide array of health professionals, from basic biomedical researchers to clinical researchers to community partners, epitomizes the vision of the NIH roadmap with a focus on rigorous, evidence-based strategies for reducing disparities in health outcomes for racial and ethnic minorities, women, and persons from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. This conference is a reminder of the merit of a vision that began 20 years ago when congressional legislation sponsored by both Congressman Louis Stokes and Congressman William Natcher appropriated funds to the Office of the Director of NIH to initiate the RCMI program. This legislation called attention to the major role that minority health professional schools had played in producing healthcare professionals who provided the bulk of the health care to minority communities. This critical funding to support the development of the research infrastructure at minority institutions, which awarded doctoral degrees in the health sciences or sciences related to health, has continued to grow from an initial seven institutions to the present cohort of 18 institutions.

The RCMI program was created, in part, as a vehicle to address some of the key disparities in health outcomes for minority populations noted in the landmark report by Dr. Margaret Heckler in 1983.<sup>1</sup> The need for cutting edge translational research addressing the healthcare needs of minority populations has continued to be addressed by the RCMI community throughout the last 20 years. The highly

visible Institute of Medicine report titled *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care* highlights the many systems that affect disparities in health outcomes.<sup>2</sup> This is reinforced by the recent reminder of Dr. David Satcher and colleagues who estimated that, if African Americans had the same outcomes as White Americans, there would be 83,570 fewer deaths per year within the African-American community.<sup>3</sup>

It has been an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to lead the RCMI program during these past 20 years and to help participate in the evolving scientific agenda to help improve outcomes for minority populations. With a portfolio of minority research institutions from Puerto Rico to Hawaii, the RCMI community has grown not only in the number of participating institutions but in the depth and breadth of scientific expertise enabling it to be a major contributor to the improvement of the nation's health. This special RCMI supplement in *Ethnicity & Disease* touches upon a few of the many exciting research activities and information technology advances that are representative of the excellence within the RCMI community.

It is my firm belief that the institutions within the RCMI community will continue to play a leading role in addressing the nation's health as the increasing diversity within America obligates the scientific and healthcare agenda of the nation to integrate the cultural, as well as the molecular and pharmacodynamic, variations that affect health outcomes, into practical treatments for health professionals. Indeed, as fortunate members of a country with the largest amount of health resources, it is our moral imperative to ensure that evidence-based, quality health care be made available to all persons. It is the mission of the National Institutes of Health to provide a foundation of scientific evidence in order to provide such health care without the limits of race ethnicity, gender, culture, or generation. I am proud to see each member institution within the RCMI program embrace this moral imperative with the passion and dedication required to turn the dreams of those who "have not" into the same realities as those who "have."

As the director of the Division of Research Infrastructure and first director for the RCMI program, I am proud to be able to share with you a few of the many highlights of our recent 9<sup>th</sup> RCMI International Symposium on Health Disparities and look forward to continuing to share with you more and more accomplish-

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ments as the years go by. In the words of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “I can walk to freedom, but only if I have a healthy body.”

### REFERENCES

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