

# TENTH ANNUAL HELa WOMEN'S HEALTH CONFERENCE: AN OVERVIEW AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

This annual conference on women's health again brought together medical leaders in obstetrics and gynecology to explore issues to improve women's health and to specifically address new approaches to eliminate health disparities among women of ethnic minority populations. Findings from the latest research on women's health were presented and led to lively discussions on the relevance of the research to practice and improved health outcomes. Two plenary sessions and five working sessions featuring 11 topics offered continuing medical education credits and new information on women's health issues ranging from the impact of the environment on preterm births to breast and cervical cancer to reproductive health and depression. Participants of this one-day conference left the sessions equipped with clinical approaches, epidemiologic data, and evidence-based solutions for eliminating women's health disparities. (*Ethn Dis.* 2006;16[suppl 3]:S3-56-S3-57)

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## INTRODUCTION

On October 4, 1951, a 31-year-old African-American woman named Henrietta Lacks quietly passed away from cervical cancer. The cancerous cells that took her life, however, live on in hundreds of laboratories around the world.<sup>1,2,3</sup> The HeLa cell line has been responsible for some of the most remarkable medical advances of the last 50 years; from their essential role in eradicating poliovirus to revolutionizing oncology research, HeLa cells have achieved immortality as a cell line that can live forever, as Mrs. Lacks also lives on in the form of countless people whose lives have been improved and extended because of her.

The HeLa Women's Health Conference was inaugurated in 1996 to honor Mrs. Lacks and the cell line that bears her name. Her family was brought to Atlanta in 1996 to attend that first HeLa Conference, in recognition of the valuable contribution made by African Americans to medical research and clinical practice. The successive HeLa Conferences have addressed cancer control, environmental exposure crisis, threatened pregnancies, maternal and child health, hormone replacement therapy, along with multiple medical educational issues in reproductive medicine. To date, nine HeLa Women's Health Conferences have addressed many issues of importance to women's health, and this year's conference—held for the second time in conjunction with the National Center for Primary Care's annual Primary Care and Prevention Conference—was no different.

As with other years' conferences, the information presented at Tenth Annual HeLa Women's Health Conference has the potential to grow, divide, and spread

beyond the walls of the meeting rooms. Like HeLa cells, we hope the information presented herein can become the cornerstone for scientific advancement in women's health. This year's full-day program explored issues related to the following objectives, while each session carried specific learning objectives. Upon completing the one-day conference, participants returned to their practices with the ability to:

- Explain birth defects and gene environmental interactions.
- Discuss the impact of the environment in shaping maternal/infant health.
- Describe breast and endometrial disparities in women of ethnic populations.
- Apply methods for improving reproductive health outcomes and preventing premature delivery.
- Demonstrate approaches for treating depression in pregnancy.
- Describe community-level empowerment programs to improve woman and child health.

Within this publication, readers will find articles on several of the presentations made during the plenary sessions. In her article, Diane Ashton, MD explores the four leading causes of infant mortality in the United States: birth defects, prematurity and low birthweight, sudden infant death syndrome, and respiratory distress syndrome. Ashton provides frequency data, information on predictors for premature births, and prevention and interventions that are being proven effective in reducing risk for preterm births.<sup>4</sup> In another article, Margaret Beale Spencer, PhD discusses how social conditions affect the emotional well-being of African-American children and adoles-

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cents.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Beale Spencer clearly demonstrates the importance of the family and community to overcome social conditions that might otherwise influence poor emotional well-being.

As the conference's keynote speaker, Dr. Joan Reede provided participants tools and resources for building strong foundations to eliminate health disparities at the grassroots level.<sup>6</sup> Reede cites health workforce diversity as a critical step for eliminating disparities as physician-patient concordance is associated with: 1) receiving preventive care and overall satisfaction with healthcare<sup>7</sup>; 2) improved ratings of physicians' decision-making styles as being more participatory<sup>8</sup>; and 3) greater patient satisfaction.<sup>9</sup> The report from Reede offers solutions for health workforce diversity and strategies to ensure access to health profession education for minorities.

In addition to information from the plenary sessions, the day's participants attended concurrently scheduled working sessions providing in-depth clinical approaches for women's health issues including breast and cervical cancer; reproductive health outcomes and the prevention of premature delivery; and treating depression in pregnancy. Community-based interventions and health policy sessions were presented on topics including: autism and vaccinations; and best practices for community-based empowerment programs for women and children. The complete program agenda follows and, readers wishing to find more details about sessions not covered in this issue are invited to visit [www.ppc5.org](http://www.ppc5.org) for visual presentations on each topic.

#### HeLa Women's Health Conference Opening Session

**Maternal/Infant Health: Understanding the Impact of the Environment in Shaping the Health of our Patients**

Prematurity—Infant Mortality: The Scourge Remains!

Diane M. Asthon, MD, MPH

Faith and Its Influence on Women's Health: The Role of Women as Nurturer of Body and Soul

Lucille Norville Perez, MD

Investigating and Linking Social Conditions of African-American Children and Adolescents with Emotional Well-Being

Margaret Beale Spencer, MD

**Working Session 3**

**Cancer: Breast and Endometrial Disparities in Women of Ethnic Populations**

Endometrial Cancer in African-American Women

O W Stephanie Yap, MD

African-American Breast Cancer Survival Disparities

Harvey Bumpers, MD

Racial Disparities in Cervical Cancer

Michael Hicks, MD

**Luncheon General Session**

**Strengthening the Foundation to Eliminate Health Disparities for Today's and Tomorrow's Adults**

Joan Y. Reede, MD, MPH, MS

**Working Session 4A**

**Improving the Rates of Infant Mortality Among Ethnic Populations**

Reproductive Health Outcomes

Ngozi F. Anachebe, MD, PharmD

Preventing Premature Delivery

Durlin E. Hickok, MD, MPH

**Working Session 4B**

**Mercury, Vaccination, Autism: Reviewing the Science and Informing Patient Trust**

Building Trust: Helping Mothers Interpret the Data and Make Sound Decisions

Sharon G. Humiston, MD, MPH

Autism, Mercury, and Childhood Immunizations

Tanja Popovic, MD, PhD

**Working Session 5A**

**Achieving Healthy Pregnancies for Ethnic Minority Women**

Treating Depression in Pregnancy: Pharmacologic and Non-Pharmacologic Options

D. Jeffrey Newport, MD, MS, M Div

**Working Session 5B**

**Best Practices: Community-Level Empowerment Programs to Improve Woman and Child Health**

Preventing Obesity in Kids and Teens

Alicia Moag-Stahlberg, MS, RD

Helping Women Carry the Load: Managing Stress and Developing Resiliency and Coping Mechanisms

Jennie Trotter, M Ed

"You've Got the Power" —Enhancing the Reproductive Health of Young African-American Males

Marion Howard, PhD

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