

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

We are glad to offer the *Proceedings of the Fourth National Conference on Health Issues in the Arab American Community* in this supplement to *Ethnicity and Disease*. This biennial conference began in 1999 to achieve ambitious objectives, including:

- to gather and generate data on Arab American health issues;
- to compare the standards of care for specific diseases within the community to other ethnicities within the United States; and
- to use the data to help direct resources, obtain funding, and design research projects to address areas of deficiencies.

The long-term goal of the conference continues to be aligning the health planning of ACCESS (Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services) and its academic and community affiliates with *Healthy People 2010*. Through the four conferences spanning the last eight years, barriers and obstacles to improving the health of Arab Americans have been identified and researched and have resulted in policies and programs to address the barriers. The conferences have offered a unique exposure to Arab American health issues to numerous constituencies including academic institutions, healthcare providers, public health agencies and community-based organizations, as well as individual physicians and other healthcare professionals working with members of the Arab American community.

In keeping with the goals of *Healthy People 2010*, the major themes of this year's conference continued to be mod-

ifiable risk factors within the Arab American community and the population-at-large. A significant component of our fourth forum was devoted to the devastating effects of tobacco use in every corner of the globe and every age bracket of all populations, particularly in the developing world and alarmingly in teenagers and young adults. Contributions on the subject encompassed areas of epidemiology, relationship to mental health and depression in particular, and the local, national and international efforts to combat the problem.

During the fourth conference, the scientific committee enhanced the emphasis on aspects of integrated health-care delivery. Our objective was to initiate a dialogue on developing a comprehensive approach to health care that addresses patients' physical and mental health concerns in a coherent and systematic way, despite the highly technical and specialized system within the United States.

We continue to build on the international component of this effort with the growing participation of researchers, specialists, and public health leaders from the Arab world. Presentations, from multiple Arab countries, offered data related to the main topics of the conference. These exchanges offer unique opportunities to enrich collaborations in areas of mutual interest, such as: programs designed to protect teenagers from starting tobacco use, educational efforts aimed at modifying lifestyle risk factors and the effort to emphasize the need for the detection and early treatment of mental health issues in the primary care setting.

Two significant additional activities took place in coordination with this year's conference.

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Pre-Conference Workshop on Reducing the Cancer Burden in Arabs and Arab Americans. Sponsored by the Collaborative Group of Research on Cancer and the University of Michigan School of Public Health.

Because of the variations in genetics of different ethnic groups and the differences in the exposure of diverse populations to environmental carcinogens, the annual incidence, the relative frequency and the subtypes of various cancers, differ markedly from one country, or population subgroup, to another. Moreover, the availability of particular treatments, as well as patients' tolerance to treatment, varies from one country or population group to another. Thus, an improved ability to control cancer among population groups, such as Arabs and Arab Americans, and to more efficiently use available resources will only be achieved by performing research in these populations. Yet, the lack of resources—both human and financial—has hindered the optimal

design and analysis of translational and clinical studies in such a setting. Overcoming these deficiencies represents an immense challenge to those dedicated to cancer control throughout the world.

Post-Conference Workshop on HIV/AIDS in the Arab American Community: Breaking the Silence! Sponsored by The Leadership Campaign on AIDS (TLCA) from the US Department of Health and Human Services.

Because HIV/AIDS is rarely addressed in private conversations among Arabs or Arab Americans, and until now has never been publicly addressed, infection rates are unclear within this population living in the United States. The goal of this workshop was to offer insight on HIV/AIDS in the Arab American community. It fostered discussion among domestic and international Arab healthcare experts and residents about HIV/AIDS and ways that Arab Americans can respond to

it. The workshop also highlighted current ACCESS efforts to address HIV/AIDS.

Finally, on an editorial note, the sequence of the material in this supplement is reflective of the structure of the conference and presents original articles based on the topics grouped by sections. In addition, other articles include: a summary of the keynote presentation by Admiral John O. Agwunobi, MD, assistance secretary of health, US Department of Health and Human Services; excerpts from a keynote address by John Seffrin, PhD, CEO of the American Cancer Society; and excerpts from a keynote address by Sabri Belgacem, MD, MPA, FFPHM, director of Systems and Services Development of the WHO-Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office. These summaries appear in Section II-Highlights from Keynote Presentations, with a more-detailed account of presentations by Seffrin and Belgacem incorporated in Section II and VI, respectively.