

A COMMENTARY: REPORTING THE STATE OF HIV/AIDS AMONG BLACK PEOPLE

By: Dr. Patrick Allen and Elle Housman

For the Fifth Annual - Caribbean American Outreach Association Inc. (CAOA)

November 11, 2006

The National Institute of Allergic and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) and The Center for Disease Controls' (CDC) most current statistics are just as disheartening as ever. Worldwide, there are currently over forty million people living with HIV, and to date over twenty million people have died due to the virus. There are fourteen thousand new infections discovered daily, of which half of those infected are under the age of twenty-five and half of those infected are of African American heritage. Of that half that is African American, 41 percent are males and sixty-four percent are females. The breakdown of transmission categories for males are: fifty percent contract the virus from homosexual contact, twenty-five percent contract the virus from heterosexual contact, and nineteen percent contract the virus from drug related needle use. The transmission categories for females are: seventy-eight percent contract the virus from heterosexual contact and nineteen percent contract the virus from drug related needle use. In 2001, HIV was deemed the second leading cause of death in African Americans aged twenty-five to forty-four.

It is estimated that nearly one million Americans are living with HIV and that over one third of the infected are unaware that they are carrying and spreading the virus. A cure for AIDS has not yet been discovered. In the meantime, the U.S. has had limited success with the use of anti-retroviral therapies in that while it has helped to decrease the amounts of deaths as a result of the AIDS virus, it is expensive, treatments are complicated, and carry with them serious side effects, not to mention that people also develop resistance to them. And, although prevention strategies are somewhat helpful in some countries, they too have limitations, which is why the current trend is a large scale media push to develop HIV vaccines, similar to those we already have for measles, mumps, rubella, and others.

Launched earlier this month in fourteen major cities in the U.S. that are currently researching vaccinations, the NIAID's public awareness campaign is called "Be The Generation", and is marketed toward America's young adults and aims to encourage them to engage in social action, similar to that of their parents and grandparents who took responsibility to advocate for their civil rights, only this time the goal for this generation is to eradicate HIV/AIDS through widespread vaccination research, in hopes of finding an effective vaccination for HIV/AIDS. If you miss the television commercials, the campaign's website is www.bethegeneration.com, where you can read frequently asked questions and answers, get more information about HIV/AIDS, and find a city near you where you can participate in the clinical vaccine trials and/or get involved in a local Community Advisory Board.

One catch is that without willing human subjects for participation in these clinical trials, the researchers will not be able to realize the effectiveness of these preliminary vaccines. Increasing the pool of Black research study participants, as well as of Black researchers, is one of the major goals of the nonprofit organization, *The Black Biomedical Research Movement (BBRM)*, founded by Jamaican born Dr. Patrick Allen in 1997. The BBRM is a community outreach program focusing on education and prevention of HIV/AIDS, as well as other diseases that disproportionately effect the Black populations in the U.S. and abroad. The BBRM's hallmark is the use of popular celebrities in music, athletics, comedy, and acting to serve as peer role models for positive health behavior change. Please contact www.bbrrm.org for one-on-one information. Dr. Allen is one of a handful of Black NIH funded scientists with the key information that you need for your HIV/AIDS concerns.