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Investigators to Study Health Disparities Research

A team of investigators at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center (UTHSC) will examine health disparities in connection to race and other social determinants of health in Memphis and Shelby County, thanks to a \$1.3 million grant from the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NCMHD), a component of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The NIH has made it a priority to focus research dollars on the differences in the burden of diseases, morbidity, mortality rates, and other adverse health outcomes affecting specific populations. The research will be funneled through the Consortium for Health Education, Economic Empowerment and Research (CHEER), a UTHSC-led collaborative initiative conducting exploratory health disparities research. CHEER partners include UTHSC, Memphis and Shelby County Health Department, Memphis Housing Authority, LeMoyne-Owen College, and First Baptist Church Lauderdale, with its independent affiliate, Mustard Seed, Inc., a non-profit organization seeking to improve the livelihood of citizens.

“In our city and state, minorities perform far worse than others when diagnosed with diabetes, heart disease, stroke, obesity, HIV/AIDS and other health issues,” said Shelley White-Means, PhD, a health economics professor at UTHSC and founder of CHEER. She has more than 25 years of research emphasis on health disparities among minorities, women, the elderly and other vulnerable populations. “The Institute of Medicine and other healthcare organizations are now discussing that stress, racism and social factors not typically associated with health frequently influence health outcomes. We’re grateful to NCMHD for the grant and eager to begin designing interventions.”

CHEER’s four-tier mission involves:

- Conducting demographic research on health outcomes;
- Designing interventions for reducing or eliminating disparities;
- Developing opportunities for healthcare providers and community leaders to collaborate; and
- Assisting healthcare and community leaders in distributing information on health disparities and related interventions.

To examine health conditions in particular populations, CHEER will perform analyses in assigned zip codes and produce geographic information systems maps illustrating health and demographic data.



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“The NCMHD grant will increase the CHEER research component, moving it closer to becoming a comprehensive center of excellence on health disparities, engaging in extensive research, collaborations, training and administration,” said Kennard Brown, JD, MPA, PhD, executive vice chancellor and chief of staff for UTHSC. “Our research infrastructure will assist CHEER through numerous studies in progress related to minority health—cancer, diabetes, hypertension, obesity and HIV/AIDS are only a few of the projects.” Even though UTHSC hopes to become a leading resource on health disparities with institutions, such as the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Morehouse School of Medicine, the university will not lose sight of the main goal: to reduce or eliminate gaps in health outcomes, both locally and beyond, said Brown.

Initially, the NCMHD grant will be used to study health disparities in the 38126 zip code, an area with a population of 8,104 (98 percent are African-American). The area ranks among the highest in Memphis and Shelby County in hospitalization rates for chronic disease, sexually transmitted diseases and crime. The zip code also has the lowest median income and education levels of any part of the city (60 percent live below poverty level; 45 percent have a high school diploma or some college; and only 4.5 percent have a bachelor’s degree or higher). CHEER will use written surveys to collect data from the 38126 citizenry. Factors impacting health will be analyzed, such as environmental exposure, genetics, healthcare access and behavioral lifestyles that reflect eating and cooking habits, sleep practices, exercise patterns and racial polarization. Also, social circumstances will be examined concerning employment conditions, housing environments, healthcare infrastructure, educational levels and experiences with racism. Specific questions will center on where they are employed, the number of persons living in a household, the quality of their housing, access to food stores carrying fresh produce, hot water access and other factors that influence health. First Baptist Church Lauderdale, a CHEER partner, is one of more than 20 churches in the 38126 zip code and will be instrumental in leading the ministerial effort to gather information.

In 2010, CHEER will conduct a community health summit to examine disturbing statistics, such as why African-Americans in Tennessee are 1.5 times more likely to die of heart disease than Caucasians, and why the state’s African-American women are 12 times more likely to die from HIV/AIDS than its Caucasian females. Other disparities for Memphis that will be addressed include the rate of heart disease (27.6 percent, compared to 6 percent in the United States); the diabetes rate (11.5 percent, as opposed to 6 percent nationally); and why Memphis ranks first in the nation in obesity. Even though the \$1.3 million NCMHD grant covers two years, White-Means plans to apply for a 5-year funding period.

GIS Maps of Our Community

What is GIS? GIS stands for geographic information system. Basically it means we can use maps to give us information about things that take place in our world-be it health, crime, business, traffic, or something else. These maps give us a deeper understanding and then inspire action to address whatever is shown.

Does your risk of using the hospital depend on where you live? CHEER will use GIS maps to answer this question. Let's look at diabetes in Memphis by zip code. As you can see in the map below, we have Memphis and Shelby County zip codes showing the risk of people ending up in the hospital due to diabetes.

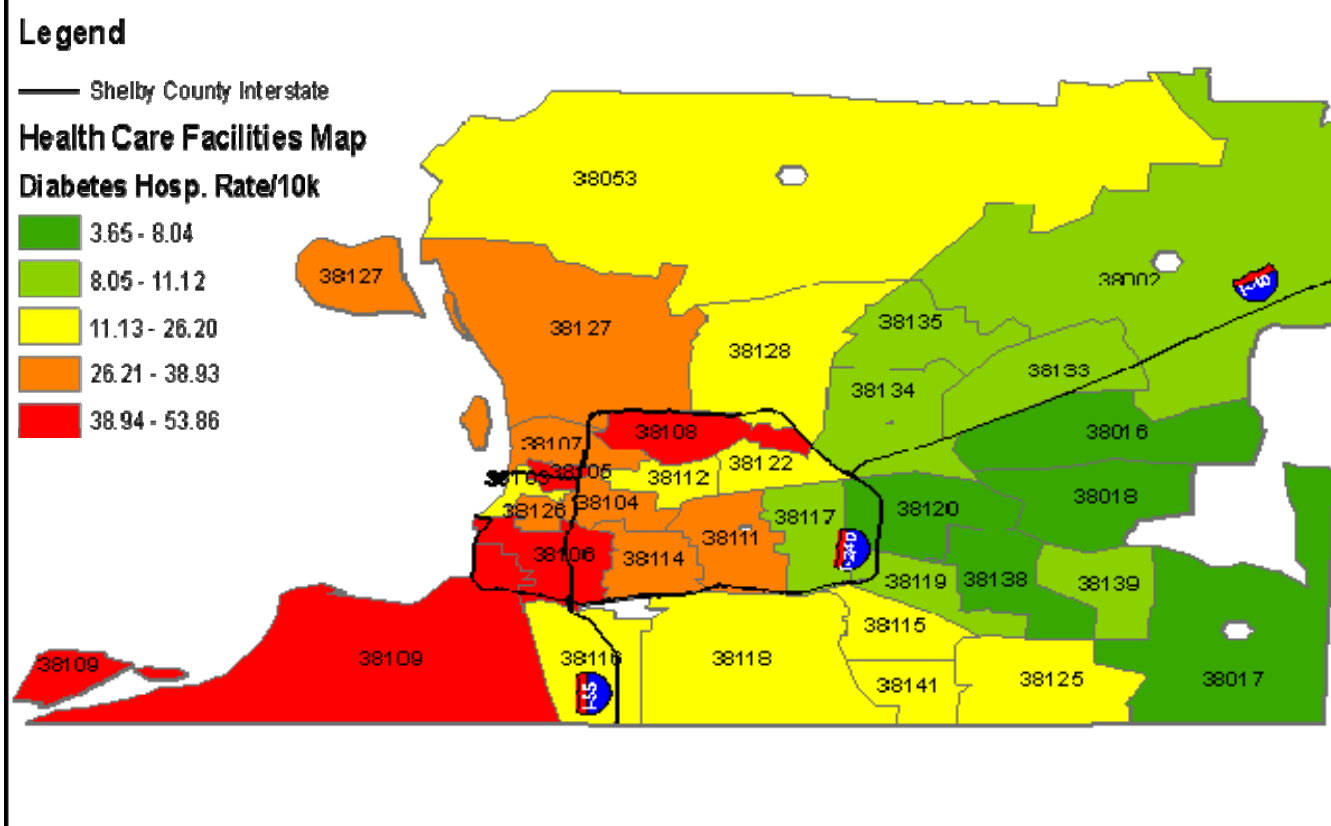
To find your risk, first find the zip code where you live. If your zip code has the color orange, then you are 5.6 times more likely to end up in the hospital for diabetes compared to people living in dark green zip codes. If your zip code has the color red, then you are 7.9 times more likely to end up in the hospital for diabetes compared to people living in dark green zip codes.

So what does this mean? It does not mean that everybody in red zip codes is diabetic. It also does not mean that people who live in yellow and green zip codes are any better than people who live in the red and orange zip codes. All it means is that we need to work together on finding ways to make sure our family and our neighbors don't end up in the hospital. Nobody should end up in the hospital due to diabetes.

CHEER will focus its activities on 38126. In future newsletters, we will show more about 38126 and what's going on in the zip code. We hope our maps will tell a story that is interesting. And then we hope the maps will inspire us all to take action to address issues in our neighborhoods.

In the next issue of The CHEERLeader, we will analyze statistical data on Hypertension, so stay tuned.

Diabetes Hospitalizations (per 10,000 persons) in Shelby County, Tennessee



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CONSORTIUM FOR
HEALTH
EDUCATION,
ECONOMIC
EMPOWERMENT
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A NCMHD EXPLORATORY
CENTER OF EXCELLENCE
IN HEALTH DISPARITIES

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A NCMHD Exploratory Center of Excellence in Health Disparities

CHEER TEAM



Sitting (left to right) Dr. Shelley White-Means (Director, CHEER), Dr. Muriel Rice (Director, Community Engagement Core), Shanell McGoy (Community Engagement), Dr. Brandi Franklin (Project Manager), Venora Petty (Coordinator); Standing (left to right) Lawrence Brown (Graduate Assistant), Dr. Noel G.L. Hutchinson (Community Engagement) and Zhiyong Dong (Statistician).

CHEER - Partners in Health Disparities Research Transforming health disparities into health possibilities

CHEER (Consortium for Health Education, Economic Empowerment and Research) is funded by NCMHD (National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities), a component of the NIH (National Institutes of Health), as an Exploratory Center of Excellence.

CHEER, a University of Tennessee Health Science Center led collaborative initiative, conducts health disparities research within the 38126 zip code. CHEER has a number of partners who are and will be essential for encouraging healthier lifestyles among citizens of all racial and ethnic backgrounds in the Mid-South area.

CHEER partners include:

The University of Tennessee Health Science Center, the Memphis and Shelby County Health Department (MSCHD), Memphis Housing Authority (MHA), LeMoyné-Owen College (LOC) and First Baptist Church Lauderdale with its independent affiliate, Mustard Seed, Inc., a non-profit organization seeking to improve the livelihood of citizens.

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We hope you enjoyed this issue of *The CHEERLeader* and found it helpful. Please feel free to share it with others.

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