

A NINR INITIATIVE TO ADDRESS HEALTH DISPARITIES

Patricia A. Grady, PhD, RN, FAAN, Director, NINR, NIH

As we begin a new year of good health and appreciation for the benefits that we as a nation experience, it is also a good time to address our unmet health needs. Within the United States, documented disparities in health status still exist among population cohorts. Evidence indicates that minority populations, for example, have higher rates of birth defects, infant mortality, cancer, asthma, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes, contributing to increased disability and shorter life expectancy. Reducing these disparities is one of two overarching goals of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) *Healthy People 2010* initiative.

To direct more research towards reducing health disparities, the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) has collaborated with the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NCMHD) to create 8 research center partnerships between schools of nursing with established research programs in health disparities and minority-serving schools of nursing. The partnership mechanism will facilitate nurse scientist collaboration and sharing of expertise, helping to increase research on health disparities and enhance the development of minority nurse researchers.

Dr. John Ruffin, Director of NCMHD, has stated, "These centers are a crucial step in the NIH effort to reduce and ultimately eliminate health disparities. Nurses are the healthcare professionals in the forefront of interacting with the public, particularly with our more vulnerable members, on matters pertaining to health. . . . Our nation needs scientifically-based interventions that work against health disparities throughout our entire society."

Together, NINR and NCMHD have committed resources for this 5-year project. Each of the newly established partnerships, involving a total of 17 university nursing programs, will have a specific research focus:

- The University of Washington and the University of Hawaii at Manoa will focus on health needs of Asian and Pacific Islanders.
- The University of Michigan and the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (MESA center) will study health promotion and restoration in the Hispanic population.
- Johns Hopkins University and North Carolina A and T State University will address 3 areas of disparity: access to care, process of care, and health outcomes.
- The University of California at San Francisco and the University of Puerto Rico will explore the needs of minority groups living with HIV disease.
- The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina Central University, and Winston-Salem State University will focus on culturally competent nursing research.
- The University of Pennsylvania and Hampton University will address the influence of culture, race, and ethnicity on health promotion and disease prevention.
- The University of Texas at Austin and New Mexico State University at Las Cruces (Southwest Partnership Center) will explore the health needs of rural, low-income Mexican-American and American Indian populations.
- Yale University and Howard University will examine self-management and self-assessment strategies to promote positive health and lifestyle changes in minority populations.

These Partnership Centers represent a major investment aimed at expanding the cadre of nurse researchers involved in minority health or health disparities research, increasing the number of research projects aimed at eliminating health disparities and enhancing the career development of potential minority nurse investigators. We all look forward to the important contribution these Partnership Centers will make to the health of the nation.