This Is Sickening

If black men care about their health, then why won't more brothas go see the doctor?

June 1, 2011 By Kate Ferguson

If you're sick and tired of seeing black men suffer from health problems that can be avoided or reduced by preventive or routine medical checkups, then join the swelling ranks of their loved ones. Why? Because black men are more likely than other population groups to suffer from undiagnosed or poorly managed chronic conditions, according to a number of studies on racial health care disparities.

What's more, additional research shows that, on average, African-American men die about seven years earlier than men and women of all other races. So why don't many black men guard their health more closely? Well, past and present study findings may hold the key.

A while back, several studies concluded that men who embraced traditional masculine roles, in general, were more likely to ignore their health because they didn't want to seem weak. But a recent study done by researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and published in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine* found just the opposite. Those findings showed that the more macho African-American men were, the faster they tended to get blood pressure and cholesterol screenings. But when they did delay health screenings, says Wizdom Powell Hammond, PhD, an assistant professor of health behavior and education at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, and the study's lead author, the reason was that they didn't trust the medical establishment.

Previous study findings showed additional reasons: For starters, some black men were simply afraid to go to the doctor. Other African-American men weren't in the habit of seeking regular medical care. In addition, brothas also complained that they felt doctors were patronizing and disrespectful. Instead of a two-party talk about their health problems, the men said, doctors commanded them to make more healthy lifestyle changes, did not explain how to make the suggested fixes and later lectured them for not following directions.

Other researchers agreed that these types of interactions show a power imbalance between black men and their docs. What's more, this inequality is aggravated by black men's lower socioeconomic status in America. Fewer black men are employed and have health insurance, so they are less likley to connect to care. Doctor visits drudge up these unpleasant issues—and who wants to deal with that? As a result, brothas often delay checkups, medical tests and critical

screenings for cholesterol levels and blood pressure.

But racial disparities could be overcome, Hammond says, if docs would try to better understand black men's diverse backgrounds and health experiences—including the historical, cultural, social and economic barriers that stop them from taking a proactive role in their own health.

Sounds like a plan that's both good for business and good for black men's health.

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