

# Everyday Heroes: William J. Mosley II, MD

## *Physician Works with African Americans to Bring Equity to Their Healthcare*

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### **CHICAGO -**

Sometimes heroes are in the spotlight – obvious and easy to identify – like firemen risking their lives to save someone from a burning building. But sometimes, most of the time, heroes are working behind the scenes, quietly going about their day without being noticed by anyone other than those they help. We think William J. Mosley II, MD is one of those heroes, and we'd like to tell you a bit about him.

Dr. Mosley, Cardiology fellow at Northwestern Memorial Hospital, has seen firsthand that African Americans, for various reasons, aren't getting the healthcare they need. And he's doing something to change that.

### **Making of a Hero**

Not long ago, leaders at Heritage International Christian Church in the West side of Chicago asked Dr. Mosley to speak to their congregation during a monthly health Sunday service. His talk was so well received that it led to a partnership between him and the church.

Working through the church, Dr. Mosley conducted a study to address the large burden of cardiovascular disease in the African American community. What that specifically means is that, compared to their Caucasian American counterparts, African Americans are:

- Three times more likely to die from cardiovascular disease
- One and a half times more likely to die of heart failure
- Nearly two times more likely to die from a stroke

The statistics are alarming. Even studies that account for differences in socioeconomic status and education show great differences in the burden of disease between African Americans and Caucasians.

### **Study Details**

The goal of the study was to learn whether providing interactive and educational sessions would lead to increased awareness and knowledge of cardiovascular disease in the African American community and whether that increased awareness would promote positive lifestyle changes that will ultimately decrease cardiovascular disease.

The study, titled African American Community Health Project (AACP-CVD) started out with an initial health screening to gather baseline health information about each participant. During the course of eight weeks, Dr. Mosley held six one-hour meetings to educate, engage and encourage participants with the goal of improving their overall health. And on the final day, he performed a second health screening to find out how much participants had improved in the following areas:

- Blood pressure
- Weight
- Waist circumference

Dr. Mosley also asked participants to take a test he created about cardiovascular and related diseases. The test contained questions about things the general community should know in order to prevent disease and improve quality of

life. They took the test at the beginning of the study and again at the end, which helped Dr. Mosley gauge how much they had learned during the meetings. Their scores improved when they took it the second time, indicating that they had learned about ways to know the symptoms of disease, what's normal and what's not in relation to health and lifestyle, and how to get the healthcare they need. The test included questions about:

- Diabetes
- Cardiovascular disease
- Nutrition
- Lifestyle – changes we need to make for general health
- What happens when people don't treat their bodies well

## **The Results**

The results are still being quantified, but they do have some encouraging preliminary data to share. Forty-five people participated in the study, and many of them lost weight, shed inches from their waistline, and saw improvements in their blood pressure. The “biggest loser,” so to speak was a woman who lost 12 pounds and seven inches from her waist. And what's even better is that the people in the study really feel like they've learned some valuable information and have gained skills that will help them continue on the path to a healthy lifestyle.

Overall, Dr. Mosley believes a number of factors contributed to the success of the study, including weight loss, lowered blood pressure, and increased knowledge:

- The church has a strong presence in the community and has a good way of motivating people.
- Dr. Mosley likes to use a “wow” factor in lectures to rope people in and keep them engaged. He tried to make his lectures entertaining and educational by using graphics, pictures and slides. He likes lectures to be interactive, so they had question and answer sessions. He also gave homework every time, and they would go over it at the beginning of the next meeting, which gave participants the opportunity to brainstorm with each other about how they can best fit the things they learned into their lives. This encouraged people and gave them new ideas, which really created the lecture and helped the change.
- They had a prayer walk one night, which gave them the opportunity to get out into the neighborhood together to get some exercise and practice their faith at the same time. They built upon it later by talking about how they could incorporate walking into their everyday life, like taking the stairs instead of the elevator or walking on their lunch breaks.
- They ended the study with a potluck dinner. The American Heart Association (AHA) has a book with heart healthy soul food recipes, so he brought the books and the brochures to the class and directed the members to AHA's Web site that has recipes with heart healthy flair, and many participants brought these heart-healthy recipes to the potluck dinner for all to try.

## **The Community Response**

The participants are excited about the results of the study, and they are eager to continue where the study left off. There is now an established group at the church that will be meeting to encourage members to lose more weight and continue with a healthy lifestyle.

It's clear that not only are they healthier after the study, they are also happy about it and want to share their experience. The participant who lost 12 pounds was so excited, that she got up in front of the whole congregation and said “I lost 12 pounds and seven inches off of my waist....” And others started standing up giving mini-testimonials, filling the church with energy and enthusiasm communicated through their words, voice, and body language.

One member called Dr. Mosley recently to let him know that her elderly mother went to Northwestern Memorial, as he had suggested, and she met one of the cardiac surgeons. In the past physicians have told her mother that there was nothing they could do for her aortic stenosis because of her age, but the doctors at Northwestern disagreed. They're working with her, and there is a good chance she is going to be in on the new percutaneous aortic stenosis clinical trial that would allow her to get a new valve without the big surgery. So in the end, a woman who before had no hope for treatment now has access to a study she wouldn't have known about if Dr. Mosley hadn't volunteered his time in her community. He loves that he has the opportunity to change and improve lives and open doors that had previously been closed.

### **Continuing to Give Back: Where to Go from Here**

Dr. Mosley is thrilled with the outcome of the study, but he's even happier to know that he and other healthcare professionals can make a real, measureable difference in the lives of the people they care for. Through the study, he realized that with just a little time and effort, he had a positive effect on the people he worked with, and ultimately, he believes he and others can have a long-term positive effect on the African American population in general.

His goal was to develop a research project that would allow him to communicate with people and help them work through their problems, like the things that are getting in the way of a healthy lifestyle and taking care of themselves. And though his work with the people of Heritage International Christian Church was technically a study, he thinks of it as more of an opportunity to get out into the community, educate people, and help them decrease their long-term risk of cardiovascular disease.

Dr. Mosley hopes that he will be able to replicate this study model across the state and, possibly, across the country. He seeks to emphasize the large and disproportionate amount of cardiovascular disease in the African American community. He wants to make people aware of it, and hopes that knowledge will lead to action and doing something about it. He plans to do just that, and looks forward to doing more of this through his career, and doing it free of charge.

As he moves ahead in his career, he wants to be a resource to the community without worrying about the bottom line, and he hopes to see other physicians donating their time – ideally once a week – to helping educate and care for people who don't have easy, affordable access to healthcare. He believes that a strong, affordable and accessible physician presence in the community will go a long way toward educating the public and preventing the long-term disease complications that are currently so prevalent.

**— Helen Tosch; February, 2011**