

Trotter Review

Volume 9
Issue 1 *Public Health and Communities of
Color: Challenges and Strategies*

Article 2

6-21-1995

Introduction

James Jennings
University of Massachusetts Boston

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umb.edu/trotter_review



Part of the [Health Policy Commons](#), [Medicine and Health Sciences Commons](#), [Public Policy Commons](#), and the [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jennings, James (1995) "Introduction," *Trotter Review*. Vol. 9: Iss. 1, Article 2.
Available at: https://scholarworks.umb.edu/trotter_review/vol9/iss1/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the William Monroe Trotter Institute at ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. It has been accepted for inclusion in Trotter Review by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. For more information, please contact scholarworks@umb.edu.

Introduction

by James Jennings

The Summer 1995 issue of the *Trotter Review*, "Public Health and Communities of Color: Challenges and Strategies," provides a range of essays and two personal commentaries on facets of public health, race, and ethnicity in urban America. The essays are written by scholars and activists familiar with public health and issues of race, access, and diversity. The first article is the Executive Summary of the Institute of Medicine's national report, *Balancing the Scales of Opportunity: Ensuring Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Health Professions*. This report focuses on the problem of underrepresentation of Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans in the health professions in this country. The authors of this report explain why underrepresentation presents a serious problem to the quality of health in communities of color. The Executive Summary highlights strategies and suggestions for encouraging greater numbers of Black, Latino, and Native American students to consider careers in health. Special thanks are extended to Dr. M. Alfred Haynes for chairing the Task Force that produced this timely report, and to Dr. Marion Ein Lewin, the staff director of the Task Force, for working with us in reproducing the Executive Summary.

The article by clinical psychologist Dr. Castellano Turner describes an ongoing effort that is co-sponsored by the Trotter Institute, the Medical School of the University of Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health, and several community organizations. The Minority Mental Health Research Center was established under the auspices of these organizations in order to foster and sponsor research and public service activities focusing on health challenges faced by communities of color. But, very importantly, such activities are being pursued in ways that encourage responses that are based on collaborative and cooperative strategies linking Black, Latino, and Asian communities. Dr. Turner provides a history of the establishment of this Center.

Ms. Gemima Remy examines the cultural biases that are built into mental health systems and services provided to ethnic minorities and immigrant groups. Perceptively, she argues that standards of ethics that are presumably an important part of the health professions should serve as a basis and license to challenge obstacles to greater access and quality of services for these groups.

The article by Dr. Marcia Wells-Lawson reviews some of the racial disparities in the health status of women. The author agrees that poverty and its effects explain a significant part of racial disparities. She adds that many poor and Black women are uninsured or underinsured, representing a serious problem for society. Another problem faced by poor and Black women is their lack of access to health information. And even when such information is available it can be culturally-irrelevant, thus not utilized fully by this sector. Some of Dr. Wells-Lawson's concerns echo those in previous articles.



The article by Drs. Deborah Prothrow-Stith and Eric Whitaker illustrates that politics and institutional accountability are vital elements of effective public health strategies. The authors utilize a case study in Boston to argue that resident and client control over public health policies and their implementation should be seriously considered by health and medical officials interested in improving services in poor and working class communities.

Dr. Clive O. Callender and his colleagues identify an issue that is not as salient as it should be in communities of color: organ and tissue transplantation. The authors believe that minority communities must become more aware of the nature of this public issue. They propose an education program that provides information about this issue and lays the foundation for a national strategy aimed at equity in the attainment of organ transplants and related services.

The article which follows, by Ms. Saskia Wilhelms, also raises the issue of equity and access of health services for minority communities. She illustrates similarities between conditions characteristic of Blacks, Latinos, and Asians described by other authors in this journal, with people of color in other countries. While Wilhelms' article suggests the critical importance of access to quality care and to comprehensive information that is culturally-relevant, she also feels that patients and people in poor and working-class communities of color must develop strategies to hold accountable officials and institutions responsible for decision making involving the quality of public health. Wilhelms proposes that "user fees," albeit at a very small level, might serve to encourage educationally and economically disadvantaged groups to heighten their sense of ownership and control over health policies and practices.

The next two articles focus on one of the most serious health problems in communities of color—AIDS. Both essays are based on the work of two activists with many years of experience in the field of public health. Mr. Ron Armstead utilizes his work in the veteran community to

suggest how some communities of color have joined forces together to work toward one common goal: addressing the effects of HIV/AIDS in communities of color. While Roland focuses on efforts in New York state, Armstead highlights an effort in Massachusetts.

Ms. Lisa Roland, a public health planner and educator, with experience in Black and Latino communities in the U.S., and in the Dominican Republic, offers some thoughts about the need for coalition building between the communities of color in order to advance the public's understanding of this problem. She feels that coalitions represent a critical element for successful community strategies aimed at AIDS prevention.

Dr. Frederick G. Adams' article, "Warning: Urban Living May Be Hazardous to Your Health—A Personal Perspective," is a short commentary based on his experiences in one of the poorest cities in America. Despite overwhelming poverty, Dr. Adams proposes that raising the public conscience about health hazards, and how to avoid them, as well as involving the participation of political leadership in Black communities, can reduce some level of danger for individuals in these places. He proposes a model with personal, and policy components, that could make urban living less hazardous.

The brief commentary by Dr. Harold Horton addresses the issue of significantly low representation of people of African descent in the medical field. This is a major problem also identified in this issue's lead article. Dr. Horton highlights the phenomenal efforts of one individual at Xavier University. This school, due to the efforts of highly committed individuals and educators working with

relatively little resources, has become one of the leading universities in the nation in terms of placing Blacks into medical schools.

Collectively, the articles and commentaries presented here propose several themes and concepts related to improving health policies and services in some communities of color: access and diversity through recruitment of minority professionals into health professions; cultural awareness; community-based participation in decision making related to public health; institutional accountability and responsibility; and, personal commitment on the part of individual educators. These ideas should be reflected in policymaking and implementation of public health services in communities of color in this country. It is these kinds of components that will considerably improve the health status in these communities.

We hope that our readers find this issue of the *Trotter Review* as informative and insightful as previous ones. Special thanks are extended to The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for sponsoring the publication of this issue. We also thank Dr. Stephanie Athey and Melissa Davis for their assistance in proofreading this issue. Suggestions about future topics, or reactions, are welcomed. Please feel free to contact our publications manager, Ms. Kimberly Moffitt, with your ideas.

James Jennings, Ph.D. is director of the Trotter Institute and professor of political science at UMass Boston. He is the author of a number of books, including *Blacks, Latinos, and Asians in Urban America* and *Understanding the Nature of Poverty in Urban America*.