

# Minority Women's Health Initiative

## Panel of Experts Address Equal Health Care for All Women

By Jean Oxendine

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“**W**omen are not well-served unless *all* women are served,” said Wanda K. Jones, Dr.PH, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Women's Health and Director of the Office on Women's Health (OWH), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Serving the health care needs of all women is the reason behind OWH's Minority Women's Health Initiative, according to Dr. Jones. “We must do all that we can to be inclusive and considerate of the health needs of all of our sisters,” she said.

OWH has made a commitment to the Minority Women's Health Initiative. New Centers of Excellence—funded by OWH—will focus on academic health centers and will serve minority women. OWH will support projects in the range of \$120,000 to \$190,000 per budget period—the rate at which the current Centers are funded.

In an effort to ensure that future physicians receive cultural competency training, OWH reviews the U.S. Medical Licensure Examination with faculty from the National Centers of Excellence in Women's Health Working Group on Underserved Populations; reviews the Liaison Committee for Medical Education's accreditation questionnaire for medical schools in the U.S., and surveys U.S. medical schools' residency programs in internal medicine, pediatrics, family medicine, and obstetrics and gynecology.

The Minority Women's Health Initiative, which began in January 1997, has three major functions: (1) convening a minority women's health panel of experts; (2) supporting minority women's organizations and projects; and (3) being involved in HHS minority initiatives, said Elena Rios, M.D., advisor on regional and minority women's health at OWH.

Support and hard work on all three areas of the initiative is evident at all levels of OWH. From the top with Dr. Jones, throughout OWH, a commitment has been made. Minority women have been made a priority.

### Panel of Minority Women's Health Experts

The panel of minority women's health experts was formed as a result of two national conferences: the joint HHS OWH/Office of Minority Health (OMH) leadership conference entitled, “The National Conference on Cultural Competence and Women's Health Curricula in Medical Education,” held in October 1995, and the January 1997 conference, “Bridging the Gap: Enhancing Partnerships to Improve Minority Women's Health.”

Selected from a nationwide nomination process, the minority women's health experts include some of our nation's leading doctors, administrators, government officials, and state directors, representing African American, Native American, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and Hispanic communities. The 31-member panel held its first meeting in November 1997, and is currently developing strategies to address the diversity in health needs and inconsistencies in health care delivery for women across the country.



The panel's mission is to provide input to and serve as a resource for OWH in the development of minority women's health initiatives. The panel also works to provide input to HHS on departmental initiatives, and to give recommendations to OWH on HHS initiatives that enhance the health of minority women in the U.S.

According to Dr. Rios, the panel has already been called upon to share its expertise and provide comments on the Centers of Excellence and the Asian American Pacific Islander Initiative. In May 1998, the panel met with HHS Secretary Donna Shalala, Ph.D., U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher, M.D., Ph.D., and Peggy Hamburg, M.D., Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. The group also discussed priority issues for minority women.

### Supporting Organizations and Projects

Through the Initiative, OWH supports organizations and projects that address minority women's health. “Our support is often through encouraging group collaboration and showing interest in the group's efforts,” said Dr. Rios.

Providing conference support for minority women is another example of OWH's dedication to serving minority organizations and projects. OWH gives conference support—either directly or through the Regional Women's Health Coordinators—to organizations of minority women who are meeting.

“Conference support is bi-directional,” said Dr. Jones. “When we support a conference, we get to know about that organization's activities and we can include them in the work we're doing. We can solicit their expertise for activities in which we are involved.”

### Participating in Minority Initiatives

The third component of the Minority Women's Health Initiative is getting OWH engaged in the HHS's minority initiatives, said Dr. Rios. These include President Clinton's Initiative on Race, HHS's Hispanic Agenda for Action, Historically Black Colleges and Universities Initiative, Tribal Colleges and Universities Initiative, and the Asian American and Pacific Islander Initiative.

Dr. Jones stressed OWH's interest in partnering with other Federal agencies, both within HHS and in other parts of the government. She said it is important for federal agencies and organizations to work together in the area of minority health, and partnering should occur between other organizations, as well.

Through the efforts of OWH's Minority Women's Health Initiative, focus will now be placed on an area that, up until now, has not received the attention it deserves. The health of minority women is crucial to the entire family. With the commitment of the leaders in OWH, this initiative is more than a lot of good ideas, according to Dr. Rios. Ideas are now turning into action in this effort to make health care equal for all women.

For more information, call OWH at (202) 690-7650. ❖

