

MCH EPI Conference

Plenary I: Measuring and Eliminating Racism and Racial Disparities in

MCH:

The Need for New Paradigms

December 8 – 11, 2008

WANDA D. BARFIELD: We now like to transition to our plenary session. Thank you. Many of our plenary sessions this year are done in response to some of the requests that came from you, the audience, about topics that you thought were important in Maternal and Child Health Epidemiology. I'd like to call up the next three speakers for our plenary session. Dr. Camara Jones is on her way, but I'd like to introduce Dr. James Collins and Dr. Vijaya Hogan.

The session today this morning is Measuring and Eliminating Racism and Racial Disparities in Maternal and Child Health: The Need for New Paradigms. As you may know, although infant mortality rates have decreased dramatically through the 1900s for both black and white infants. The racial disparity has actually increased and these racial disparities have been looming in the U.S. despite various adjustments for race, age, education, and social economic status. And the measurement of racial bias in health resources, health care access, and care, as well as the burden that these disparities may have over the generations is really an important aspect of understanding the persistent racial disparities in maternal and infant and child health morbidity and mortality.

The black-white disparities, in particular, in maternal and child health continue to be a national disgrace. However, these disparities are still not well understood and it's been difficult to measure. So, continuing to use the conventional measurements has not really led to the improvement in maternal and child health disparities. As public health leaders, however, we really need to envision the areas of racism and racial disparities from a new perspective and with a new paradigm.

Our first speaker is Dr. Vijaya Hogan. Dr. Hogan is the Director of Curriculum on Health Disparities and Clinical Associate Professor in the Department of Maternal and Child Health at the University of Carolina, Chapel Hill. She is well known on her work in maternal and child health disparities and pre-term delivery among minority populations. She's the former MCH epidemiologist at the Michigan Department of Community Health and the former coordinator of CDC, MCH EPI Program and also the former lead for researching in that area, the black-white pre-maturity gap.

Dr. Camara Jones will probably come just in a few minutes but what we'll do is we will have our next speaker be Dr. James Collins. Dr. Collins currently serves as the attending neonatologist at Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago and is the professor of Pediatrics at Northwestern University Medical School in Chicago. He's an outstanding clinician and he's been well known for major contributions in

the investigation of racial and ethnic disparities in diverse perinatal outcomes including low birth rate, pre-maturity, and mortality.

Over the last decade, and particularly well before addressing racial and ethnic disparities was even popular, he and a colleague, Dr. Richard David, began to address the difficult questions of the contribution of genetics versus the environment for racial and ethnic disparities and pregnancy outcomes.

I remember, actually as a medical student, the work that Dr. Collins did in looking at racial disparities among bi-racial infants, and for me, it really did show that there is an important aspect to the experience of African-American women that are unique. At this time, what I'd like to do is have Dr. Vijaya Hogan come up and give her first presentation. Thank you.