

Delivering World-Class Care in Their Own Backyard:

Cleveland Clinic Surgeon Works with Colleagues to Reduce Minority Health Issues

The hard facts of health care disparities both haunt and drive Charles Modlin, M.D., a Cleveland Clinic kidney transplant surgeon, board-certified urologist and director of the Minority Men's Health Center (MMHC) in the Cleveland Clinic's Glickman Urological Institute.

As a black physician, Dr. Modlin is keenly aware of the facts: that black men are 66 percent more likely than Caucasian men to develop prostate cancer and ultimately die from it; that blacks have the highest rates of lung, breast, prostate and colon cancers of any population in the world; that 35 percent of black men have hypertension compared to 20 percent of Caucasian men; and that black men are 180 percent more likely to die of stroke than their Caucasian counterparts.

"For me it is all about eliminating health care disparities," says Dr. Modlin, one of only 20 black transplant surgeons in the country and the only one who is a urologist.

A Mission to Resolve Minority Health Care Issues

Creating parity was the impetus for the MMHC, which opened in June 2004 on the Cleveland Clinic's main campus.

"The Cleveland Clinic, situated right in the heart of Cleveland's minority community, is one of the world's greatest medical institutions," Dr. Modlin says. "What better place to take on the challenge of eradicating health care disparities?"

The MMHC provides direct patient care, education and outreach to minority men, who suffer from prostate cancer, kidney disease, kidney failure and prolonged waits for organ transplantation. "It is one of the first programs of its kind committed to providing comprehensive culturally sensitive health access, treatment and education to minority men," Dr. Modlin says. It is also the only such specialty program located within a urological institute.

The MMHC is open on Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. It is open to patients regardless of their health insurance status. "I like to think we are a friendly one-stop shopping portal of facilitated patient care access," Dr. Modlin says. Although the



Carlumandarlo Zaramo, M.Sc. (left) and Dr. Charles Modlin (right) work to eradicate health care disparities.

center primarily is focused on urologic problems, each patient sees internist Oluranti Aladesanmi, M.D., who is the medical director of the MMHC. And Dr. Modlin hopes to soon add a nutritionist to his team. The center is open to men of any race, and Dr. Modlin refers patients to his colleagues. "It is important for minorities to understand that the expertise of the entire Cleveland Clinic is open to them."

The causes of health care disparities are multifaceted, Dr. Modlin says, and include genetic predispositions, biological and environmental causes and lifestyle habits. Dr. Modlin has gained support from Ohio state officials and legislators to introduce legislation mandating cultural competency training for physicians and health care providers in Ohio.

Educating the Community is Key

Under Dr. Modlin's direction, the MMHC has initiated a number of community outreach efforts in the black community aimed at educating and benefiting minority men. Dr. Modlin has addressed urban high school students, urging minority students to enter the health care field. He also has spoken to numerous church congregations and community organizations throughout the state about the importance of preventive medicine (e.g., cancer screenings, mammograms and blood pressure checks) as a way of reducing disparity.

continued on page 4

The Importance of Prostate Exams: One Man's Story

When he read an article about the Minority Men's Health Center (MMHC), something told *Roger D. he should schedule an appointment. "I had regular checkups, but not a PSA (prostate-specific antigen) test to detect prostate cancer," he says. Because blacks have almost twice the incidence of prostate cancer than Caucasians, and it is usually more aggressive, physicians and the American Urological Association recommend blacks have a PSA test in their 40s.

After Roger saw Charles Modlin, M.D., a urologist and transplant surgeon in the MMHC, a complete battery of tests were ordered, including a PSA. The result of Roger's PSA was concerning, so he was scheduled for a prostate biopsy. That biopsy revealed cancer.

What is PSA?

Prostate-specific antigen, or PSA, is a protein that is shed by cells in the prostate gland.

Because prostate cancer cells multiply faster than ordinary cells, they release more PSA into the bloodstream. With a simple blood test, doctors can measure the amount of PSA and tell if PSA levels are higher than they should be. The PSA test does not diagnose cancer; that requires a biopsy. In a biopsy, the physician takes a small sample of cells with a thin needle and a pathologist studies them under a microscope. The pathologist looks for cells that show characteristics of cancer.

A computer-assisted tomography scan showed that the cancer was confined to his prostate, which meant Roger was a candidate for several different treatment options.

Dr. Modlin explains that prostate cancer grows slowly and, therefore, it may not affect the lifestyles of older men. "In these men, a course of watchful waiting may be recommended," says Dr. Modlin. Other treatment options include:

- **External beam radiation therapy**, which focuses a tight beam of radiation on the cancer.
- **Brachytherapy**, which involves planting small radioactive seeds into a tumor. The radiation the seeds release matches the shape of the tumor so that nearby normal cells are largely unaffected.
- **Cryotherapy**, in which a thin probe is inserted into the tumor to freeze and destroy it.
- **Radical surgery (prostatectomy)**, a procedure in which the tumor is cut out. At the Glickman Urological Institute, this can be done as a minimally invasive procedure. The cancer is removed through thin tubes inserted near the prostate. There is minimal scarring and recovery is far faster than open surgical procedures.

Roger opted for brachytherapy implants because the cancer was small. The seeds were implanted in December 2004.

Dr. Modlin says that it is not unusual for men like Roger to miss PSA screenings. "Blacks are reluctant to get screenings," he explains. "It may be a lack of access, a lack of insurance or cultural factors such as a distrust of the health care system that comes from myths about cancer." The MMHC was established to dispel these myths by getting the word out and encouraging men to come in for screenings and health care.

"Blacks should be aware that they are at increased risk for prostate cancer," says Dr. Modlin.

"My experience shows that early detection is the most important thing," says Roger. "Men should get annual prostate exams that include the PSA test."

** Pseudonym used to protect the confidentiality of the patient.*

High Blood Pressure Nothing to Sing About

Busy working as the chairman of the music department at the Cleveland School of the Arts and as director of the R. Nathaniel Dett Concert Choir, William Woods didn't give his blood pressure much thought. In fact, the only thing troubling William in December 2004 was a slightly guilty conscience for not having had a physical exam in a while. So he decided to visit the Minority Men's Health Center.

"It had been years since I had visited a doctor and, even though I was feeling great, I thought there could be things going on that I did not know about," William said. "I got an appointment and went to see Dr. Aladesanmi. The blood pressure reading was slightly high – 140/98 mm Hg. He said to get a blood pressure monitor and come back in a few weeks. I did and it stayed high. Dr. Aladesanmi then said we needed to treat this. I was not surprised. High blood pressure runs in my family."

And high blood pressure, also known as hypertension, runs in many black families. **In fact, blacks tend to develop high blood pressure at an earlier age and, when it occurs, it is usually more severe.** Because of this, blacks also are at greater risk of stroke. In the black population, the risk of death from heart disease is one-and-a-half times higher than Caucasians and the risk of end-stage kidney disease is five times greater, according to the American Heart Association.

There are a number of medications that help control high blood pressure, but medications alone do not solve the problem. A healthy diet and lifestyle can have a big impact.

William managed to make some healthy changes in his diet. "Dr. Aladesanmi and I talked about a low-salt, low-fat diet that included lots of fiber and lots of vegetables. The main thing was cutting down on fried foods. I have always been a lover of fried fish. Now instead of frying it, we bake it," said William.

Exercise, which is also important in preventing and controlling high blood pressure, was not a challenge for William, as he



William Woods, photograph by Russell Lee.

always has exercised. In the winter he uses an indoor exercise machine and he rides a bicycle in the spring, summer and fall.

High blood pressure is often called "the silent killer" because there are usually no signs or symptoms of it. In fact, the only way to truly know if your blood pressure is healthy is to have your doctor check it. William did not have symptoms. He was lucky that he decided to go to the Minority Men's Health Center when he did.

"I just thought that I ought to do something about my health even though I felt good. I think the problem with a lot of men is that they feel alright and think that nothing is wrong. Though it runs in my family, I didn't expect (high blood pressure) but, there it was, so I had it treated," he said.

"My advice is to go to a physician and get yourself checked. Do things that you know will help your health. Doctors and hospitals will treat you if you are ill but the best thing is to not get ill by living better. That really is not the doctor's or a hospital's responsibility. It is your responsibility to keep your body up," William says.



What is high blood pressure?

Unless you are jogging while reading this, your blood pressure should be around or below 120/80 mm Hg (systolic over diastolic pressure). When you are at rest, your heart beats around 80 times a minute. As it pushes blood into your veins, your pressure rises (systolic pressure). When your heart relaxes between beats, pressure falls (diastolic pressure). Blood pressure needs medical attention when it reaches 140/90 mm Hg or higher.

One in every four adults, or 65 million Americans, has high blood pressure – a 30 percent increase during the last 10 to 15 years. High blood pressure occurs in almost 39 percent of blacks, or more than one in three black adults.



Meet a Health Mentor

Oluranti Aladesanmi, M.D.

Oluranti Aladesanmi, M.D., is medical director of the Minority Men’s Health Center and a specialist in internal medicine. Dr. Aladesanmi offers patients an assessment of their overall health through physical exams and offers advice and information on ways patients can take better control of their health.

Dr. Aladesanmi joined Cleveland Clinic in 2001. He obtained his medical degree from the University of IFE, faculty of Health Sciences, ILE-IFE, in Nigeria, where he also completed an internship. Dr. Aladesanmi completed residency training at the Interfaith Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York. He received a master’s degree in public health from Harvard University School of Public Health.

Dr. Modlin *continued from page 1*

As evidence, more than 700 minority men attended the third annual Minority Men’s Health Fair on the Cleveland Clinic campus in April 2005, up from 230 participants the previous year.

Working with his colleague Carlumandarlo Zaramo, a Cleveland Clinic research fellow and health educator, Dr. Modlin has developed a tool kit to help increase health literacy in the black community. “Minorities may not understand the importance of preventive medicine,” he says. An assessment of the efficacy of the tool kit has shown that it has resulted in significant improvements in health literacy levels.

“Health literacy, (which is) the ability to understand, comprehend and assimilate health information,” Dr. Modlin adds, “is directly related to improved health outcomes and quality of life.”



Ron Kisner, 57, a public relations professional, was so impressed on his first visit to the MMHC that he has become “a pied piper” in getting other black men into the center, including his father, brother-in-law and members of his church. “Dr. Modlin is very open; he takes time with you and listens to your story. He referred me to other physicians and I have been very pleased.”

The Future of Reducing Minority Health Disparities

Although the initial focus of the MMHC is to improve the understanding and treatment of urological diseases in minority men, the long-term goal is to become a national model for access and parity in diagnosis and treatment of minority men’s health.

“We are not trying to exclude women and children,” Dr. Modlin is quick to explain. “Our plans include establishing a Cleveland Clinic-wide center for health equity that would treat minority women and children as well.” Dr. Modlin is trying to increase funding support and is working closely with the Cleveland Clinic Lerner Research Institute to gain additional data on the genetic and biologic bases for disparities.

You can reach the Minority Men’s Health Center at 216.444.6400.

Free Health Screenings

Don’t Miss the 4th Annual Minority Men’s Health Fair

The Cleveland Clinic Minority Men’s Health Center will host the Minority Men’s Health Fair on Wednesday, April 26 from 5-8 p.m. in the lobby of the Crile Building, 2049 E. 100th St.

Attendees will receive free screenings for prostate cancer, blood pressure, glaucoma, oral cancer, diabetes, sickle cell and cholesterol. The health fair also will include health seminars and information tables related to topics such as stroke prevention, smoking cessation and nutrition. The Minority Men’s Health Center’s goal is to address the unique health issues in minority men and provide the necessary information for prevention and treatment of their common health problems. Last year, more than 700 men attended the health fair.

Parking is free. For more information, please call 216.444.6400.