

African Americans, Hispanics face greater risk of heart failure

February 18 2016, by Cathy Lewis

More than 915,000 Americans will be diagnosed with heart failure this year, according to the recently published American Heart Association 2016 Statistical Update.

Heart failure, a chronic, progressive condition in which the heart can't pump blood efficiently to meet the body's needs, is one of the most common heart diseases in the United States. In the next 15 years, the number of people living with the condition is expected to increase substantially – from 5.7 million to nearly 8 million by 2030 – and treatment costs will nearly double.

The statistics for minorities are even more startling. Studies show heart failure disproportionately affects African Americans, with incidences roughly double that of whites. This population is also at greater risk of developing the condition at younger ages and dying from it.

Hispanics have the second-highest risk of developing heart failure and are more likely to be younger, have diabetes or high [blood pressure](#) and be overweight/obese. Studies also show Hispanics with heart failure have higher rates of hospitalizations and readmissions for heart failure.

Numerous studies point to higher rates of modifiable risk factors such as [high blood pressure](#), diabetes and obesity as the reason these groups are more likely to have heart failure.

Education is crucial because people of all races aren't aware of [heart](#)

[failure symptoms](#) or risk factors. And those who suffer from the condition, may not realize they have it.

"These statistics highlight the need for all Americans to get an annual checkup, and especially for [minority populations](#)—who are at higher risk—to start in early adulthood to check blood pressure," said Mariell Jessup, M.D., a former president of the American Heart Association and a cardiologist at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. "Heart failure is preventable and treatable. Data shows that if we can control blood pressure, we may prevent heart failure. This specifically has the potential to reduce the incidence of heart failure in minority populations."

Jessup's advice resonates with twins Kimberly Ketter and Shaun Rivers, of Richmond, Va.

The sisters, both nurses and African American, ignored early warning signs and got their heart failure diagnoses one week apart at the age of 40 in 2009. The diagnosis was particularly surprising, because they did not have the typical risk factors. While their heart failure stemmed from a genetic condition, they now understand the importance of tuning into the body's warning signals, living a healthy lifestyle and seeing a doctor regularly.

They join a newly established team of American Heart Association Heart Failure Patient Ambassadors through the [Rise Above Heart Failure](#) initiative. The group works to increase awareness and understanding of [heart failure](#), sharing personal experiences and helpful resources.

Additionally, Kim and Shaun share their story in hopes of saving the lives of fellow parishioners at The Saint Paul's Baptist Church, leading the American Heart Association's [EmPowered To Serve](#) initiative

they've established there. EmPowered To Serve is a national strategic initiative partnering with faith-based and other organizations serving minority populations to improve health outcomes in underserved communities

"It all boils down to access to care and education," said Rivers, Advanced Diabetes Clinical Nurse Specialist. "We need to go out and educate in schools and churches—where the people are. It's going to take a whole lot of effort from a whole lot of people to create change on a larger scale."

Another simple piece of advice they offer: Don't ignore signals from your body—or from your lineage.

"Many people don't talk about their health concerns, but knowing your family history is key," said Ketter, a nurse practitioner. "I tell people to do a family tree. You could be genetically predisposed to high blood pressure, diabetes or heart disease. Education is a huge first step. If people know they are at risk, they can start tackling the problem early."

The American Heart Association launched the Rise Above Heart Failure initiative last year to increase the dialogue about the condition, empower patients to take a more active role in their care, and encourage small changes that can lead to healthier lifestyles and better disease management to help keep patients out of the hospital. Rise Above Heart Failure is nationally supported by Novartis Pharmaceutical Corp.

Provided by American Heart Association

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