
The June 26 morning session of the 8th Annual Disparities in Health in America Workshop held at the University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston was dedicated to Health, Health Disparities and Health Policy. This session was led by the RWJF fellows of 2008-2009 who served on Capitol Hill during the drafting of the health care reform legislation signed into law in March.

**Dr. Leonard Zwelling** (Senate HELP, office of ranking member Michael B. Enzi, R-WY) chaired the session.

**Dr. Margaret Moss** (Senate Aging, office of ranking member Mel Martinez, R-FL) led the program by discussing the health care needs of American Indians. She is the only American Indian/doctorate level nurse/attorney in the country. Dr. Moss explored the genesis of the comparatively short life expectancy of American Indians and what can be done to reverse this trend. Dr. Moss will soon assume her new position as an Associate Professor at the Yale School of Nursing.

**Dr. Justina Trott** (Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-NM) discussed the differences between sex (a biologic phenomenon) and gender (an environmental one) and their relative effects on women’s health. The interplay between external events and inherited molecular changes is rarely considered when health policy is made, yet unambiguous scientific studies demonstrate the determinants of women’s health are influenced by both nature and nurture. She made the case for using a sex/gender lens to explore the impact of genetics, environment and policy on health outcomes. Dr. Trott is the Director of Policy, Research and Education at Women’s Health Services in Santa Fe, NM.

We missed our colleague **Dr. Reginald Alston** (Sen. Tom Harkin, D-IA), an expert in disabilities and rehabilitation in minority populations. Reggie was called away at the last minute, but his colleague Dr. Regine Rucker stepped in to review his research showing how race is a moderating factor in access to rehabilitative services. Dr. Alston is a Professor of rehabilitation and Associate Head in the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaigne.

**Dr. Janet Phoenix** (Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-UT) discussed how the new health legislation could promote the delivery of quality care to the underprivileged. Dr. Phoenix warned that very little attention had been paid to readying the institutions that service the poor for the wave of newly insured patients that will be generated by the bill’s provisions. Dr. Phoenix is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Health Policy and Environmental and Occupational Health in the School of Public Health of George Washington University.

Finally, **Dr. Thomas Tsang** (House Ways and Means, Rep. Charles Rangel, D-NY) discussed the importance of new investment in health information technology infrastructure and the concept of “meaningful use” of HIT as the means by which
information systems will lead to better patient care. Dr. Tsang is the Medical Director, Meaningful Use Division at the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology in Washington, D.C.

All of the fellows wish to thank Dr. Lovell Jones and the staff of the Center for Research on Minority Health of the UT M. D. Anderson Cancer Center for being such gracious hosts in sponsoring our participation in this important annual workshop. We would also like to thank Dr. Eugenie Kleinerman, Head of the Division of Pediatrics and the Children’s Cancer Hospital at M. D. Anderson for her presentation with ours on Children with Cancer as an Underserved Minority and for hosting a dinner the night before our session with Dr. Zwelling at their home.

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