

**OHEC Town Hall Meeting  
Langston University – OKC Campus  
September 18, 2008**

Conversation W/Moms Of Pre-Term Babies

*Responses from Panelists*

**Questions: Each panelist asked to describe their experience.**

What I had to say was unimportant – didn't know what I was speaking about – young – felt like I wasn't properly taken care of

Health care system let you down.

My baby was born 7 weeks early – 2.2 lbs. – hard for me – never experienced pre-term birth – had a lot of help from SoonerStart & SoonerCare – experience was rocky

So the programs helped.

Been pregnant five times – cervix was sewed up to carry a baby – third pregnancy just opened up & delivered a baby who subsequently died. Got pregnant again & it was stressful. Had a lot of support. Work for healthy start. Gave birth to Maxwell a month early. Got to take him home. Didn't know how to space my pregnancies very well. Fear consumed me. Kept me from going to the doctor – I knew I'd have to have my cervix sewed up again. Got a decent job, education, good support – didn't matter. Had 3 doctors with Maxwell. It was overwhelming.

If I can't fix it. I don't worry about. It hangs there but I don't let it bother me....

**Question: How do you protect yourself under stress?**

Pray.

**Question: As African American women some of the things we feel just don't go away. We're told to eat right, exercise....do any of those things help you?**

Actually, they do. Changed my diet, walk, read a little more, try to change the things that stress you.

I have an aunt. When I need extra rest or babysitter, they keep her overnight. Also have 17-year-old daughter & she's a great help.

## Large Group Response To The Film

### **Question: What moved you?**

What social programs were cut in 80s that lead to the incidence & increase of pre-term birth?

One in particular – Fed'l funds for federally qualified health centers received a huge budget cut. African American individuals received care from those institutions. Many of those clinics closed during that time.

Preventative kinds of programs were drastically cut.

Mental health services were drastically cut.

Subsidized meals for public school systems were also cut.

### *Large Group Response To The Film – Other Responses*

### **Question: What moved you?**

Reduced level of care that many children would receive which can stress parents as well.

Could it be that ongoing lifelong elevated cortisol level is affecting these women & impacting those pregnancies?

Men may have infertility problems as well. Cortisol may have influence on that as well.

Racism

Length of elevated cortisol to breast cancer in African American women. Higher #s of breast cancer & decreased number of survival rates.

Film moved me –

There is an additional portion to Dr. Lu's presentation. I just returned from Michigan which has a very high infant mortality rate. Link on their website where Dr. Lu gives an hour long presentation. Discusses cortisol issue on MI dept of health website & discusses not only affecting pregnancy but affecting brain & behavior of children. Summit they hosted.

### *Other responses to film*

- Initiatives & plans & procedures to advance racial equality:

- What are some of the things we can do? I see a racial divide in OK. Are there things we can do to improve the racial things in this state?
- Locally African American babies die twice as much as white babies in OK county. 14.9 IM per 1000 live births compared to white babies.
- HealthyStart promotes advocacy & policy. We have case managers, outreach workers. Go to legislators for solutions. Work on Governor's task force.
- Representative Shelton has helped HealthyStart out.
- Legislators need to help & be helpful & make policies that help people. Senator Johnson is our resident guru of health issues & a member of the Black Caucus.
- INTEGRIS physician – attended African American health forum this past Saturday – very informative – preventive medicine is key – big advocate of educational programs in the community. Like to see more educational programs to make our community aware of the issue.
- Across ages as well as socioeconomic levels.
- Is there a correlation between Native American birth rate too?
- None of the groups are doing well – white, Latina, African American
- The film clearly speaks about racism, which is the elephant in the room tonight. Racism is a problem. Don't think there's a task force that can solve the problem but in conversations we can address the problem. If we're honest & say the problem is a deep systemic problem. Identify that racism exists in all aspects of our life. Have to be honest.
- Healthy Moms/Healthy Babies Coalition – Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy – want to make everyone aware of potential avenue – 10/7-8 legislative Fall Forum. Invite child advocates to attend. Active in advocating for children's issues in the legislature. [www.oica.org](http://www.oica.org) to register online. Two scholarships to private individuals who may be in attendance tonight. Have a maternal & child health workgroup. At end of forum, have about 10 legislative items that we take to the Capitol.
- Relation between IM & teen pregnancy. To lower # of IM, need to work on teen pregnancy. They are not physically & emotionally ready to have those babies. May not be able to provide the care babies need. Need to start providing education in schools & communities. Need to educate parents. Teach young people about sex. Not to see teen pregnancy as an option.

- HELP – Health Employment Leadership Planning – need to make resources more accessible to people – birth of HELP coalition.
- In thinking about strategies, I would ask that we think about responsibility & coping in terms of our young men. We often think of young women in terms of delaying pregnancy & sexual activity. Need to talk to our young men about the same things – delaying childbirth until there is a nest to put the young one in. There are so many factors in society that have an impact on us in terms of our cortisol level that we can't control. If we teach our youngsters to at least control the things they can – their own bodies. Perhaps we can take the next step & go out into society & do something about racism.
- Also need to take a look at what happens in our education institutions. University questioned medical students. Many didn't feel access to healthcare is a right. It's not a position where healthcare is a right for the rich. It's a right for everyone. Being able to provide the insight to those who are providing our healthcare is very important.
- Diversity training for healthcare providers.
- Individual basis & institutional basis. We do need our white allies. Wonderful history when white, blacks, Latinos, African Americans, Asians join forces. Change has to come from the white community. White community listens more to those from their own community. Educate & help increase understanding.
- Old racism – separated by loss.
- Aversion racism – continue to deny that characteristics make a difference. Speak to friends, relatives about how you can change & how they can change.
- Institutional racism – look at how the new racism is presented to our public through rhetoric & media. Center of attention is placed on minorities. Question our institutions. Why is there not better representation in our institutions. Must challenge institutions & everyone to do better because we are better.
- When I look at “When the Bough Breaks,” it made me sad. How far back can we make changes to prevent this from happening? One of the places where we need to look at the system is employment for people. A lot of times those in position to hire people, we let the blue hair, unique look put us off. Those of us in positions to hire must look at our own internal systems & look at what we are doing. Having a job is almost like a cure. When people say they don't have a job, we often think it's their fault. Sit down & talk about how are we hiring. What are the ways that we discriminate that we don't really realize? Sometimes people just don't know. It just becomes automatic. Evaluate your hiring systems. Bring people of color into the conversation & ask what can we do differently to increase employment.

- Nobody has brought up the church. The church, especially the Christianity, church says we have to love our neighbors as we do ourselves. How can we say we got racism if we got love? Maybe churches need to stop & consider the dogma that they're preaching from so we can have less segregation.
- Appreciate forum. It is a process whereby we receive information & give us direction to go in terms of legislation. We depend on you to come & be our backup to let them know that we, in fact, do need change. Entities here represent substantial knowledge base. There are many other entities that focus on similar goals that need to be involved. Feel positive about what's coming out of this. IM – let's start with the children. The stress is literally killing us as we age regarding what we do & don't do. Cardiovascular disease. Appreciate what comes out here to help with the black caucus to focus.
- Put the public back in public health – manifest in Turning Point. The kind of thing that is going on here tonight can go on all over the state through Turning Point coalitions. Time to put people back in the legislation. Teen pregnancy – what I see consistently is that parents are not effectively communicating with their children. Encourage you to talk to your neighbors & feed back into what's being done at the state health department. I believe were at a turning point. We need to tell them what we need & then go for it.
- Outreach to women & their families in preconception to get that stress under control. About being able to deal with people. In state with less than 8% African American population, do not take time to get to know others from different cultures than yours. Just get to know people & open up dialogue. Don't assume they're lazy, of no account, do not deserve health care. Good health care is a right not a privilege.
- Treating symptoms & not cause. Not much we can do about racism if the other side doesn't want to do anything about racism. What gives you freedom is independence & when you depend on everyone else for everything, then you can't be free. To be free, you've got to be independent of other people. Unemployment for black youth is double, triple for other youth. In terms of economics, we're at bottom of totum pole. We provide very little for one another & that needs to change. To come together, you've got to have something to bring to the table. Economic development, job creation. We need to do in the black community.
- Gaps in our information base. We know that we have high IM rate. We also know there's a significant # of people who do not have pre-term or low birth weight babies. There may be some more information that we need to gather or that already exists to find out what it is that's happening in the lives of women who are not having pre-term & low birth weight babies that's allowing them to do it. Maybe we need to gather a catalog of coping mechanisms.

- Quality of relationships between men & women, parents & children, siblings impacts how we respond to circumstances. Key part to success is the quality of the relationships & how we communicate. Has to be in the forefront. Collaborate with what's going on here & take it to a bigger level.
- Town hall meetings & first thing you want to do is make a change. Try to be more innovative because if you don't, we'll go back to what we've already done. The answer is not in the office. It's in the community. We have to educate people, youngsters.