



# *dateline:* UVI

The monthly newsletter of The University of the Virgin Islands

October 28, 2005, vol xi, number 10

## Change Behavior and Live Longer Institute Suggests

Our behavior is killing us. That was the collective message at UVI's Nursing Division health disparities conference held in October. Presenter after presenter spoke about how the risk of getting diabetes, obesity, hypertension, sexually transmitted diseases and cancer can be reduced if we modify our behavior.

"Behavior modification is hard for all of us, but I think it is the key to preventing what we know is the number one killer in the Virgin Islands," said Dr. Michael Potts, referring to cardiovascular disease. Dr. Potts, the chief of cardiology and director of the Intensive Care Unit at the Gov. Juan F. Luis Hospital on St. Croix, spoke on hypertension, one of the five identified health disparities in the Virgin Islands, which leads to a variety of other disorders, including cardiovascular disorder. A health disparity is the difference in the occurrence, severity, and the burden of diseases, and the differences in the life expectancy that exist between ethnic minority population groups compared to other groups.

"The challenge and the art of treating cardiac diseases are still prevention," Dr. Potts said. The behaviors of people of the Virgin Islands are rooted in cultural and social tradition, which must be understood in order for changes to be made, he said. Along with diseases of the heart, hypertension can also lead to diseases of the brain, kidneys and arteries.

One major myth among men is that taking hypertension or blood pressure pills reduces sexual function, Dr. Potts said. So some men, believing that myth, may not take the medication. Dr. Potts explained that it is untreated hypertension that may reduce sexual function – not the medication.

Potts said that the steps to reducing and preventing hypertension are simple: following the DASH eating plan, reducing sodium intake, increasing physical activity and reducing alcohol consumption to moderation.

Those same steps can help to reduce obesity, another V.I. health disparity. Edward C. Jones, a doctoral candidate at Cornell University who is researching childhood obesity in the V.I., said that obese children tend to be obese adults, and obese adults are predisposed to a list of other diseases – including hypertension, type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol, asthma, early menstruation, orthopedic defects and lowered self esteem. "Children now are more obese than their parents," said Jones, a public health nutri-



*A UVI nursing student asks a question at a health disparities institute as her classmates look on.*

tionist with the Health Department's Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children. Jones said that prior to his research there were no studies of childhood obesity in the V.I. He said that data from his research must be compared to that of other Caribbean islands along with that of the United States to better understand the problem.

When it comes to HIV and sexually transmitted diseases the problem is clear. "We have an STD epidemic in the Virgin Islands," said Dr. Gayann Hall, the medical director of the V.I. Health Department's STD-HIV-TB Programs.

"For the size of the population we have, there's a lot of HIV," Dr. Hall said. The HIV/AIDS rate in the V.I. is the third in the nation in prevalence, she said. The highest rate of transmission is through heterosexual sex. There are also many cases of gonorrhea and chlamydia, both of which often go undiagnosed and untreated because they are usually asymptomatic.

"Chlamydia is the number one cause of infertility in the United States," Dr. Hall said. Both chlamydia and gonorrhea increase the risk of HIV transmission. Hall mentioned that the territory's

*Health continued on next page*

### *Events Calendar*

|                |                           |         |
|----------------|---------------------------|---------|
| Oct. 28        | Architecture Colloquium   | STT     |
| Oct. 29        | Jazz Ensemble Concert     | STT     |
| Oct. 29        | Class of 2006 Meeting     | STT     |
| Oct. 30-Nov. 1 | Campus Photo Shoot        | STX     |
| Nov. 1         | Clash of Giants Fun Day   | STT     |
| Nov. 2-Nov. 4  | Campus Photo Shoot        | STT     |
| Nov. 11        | Tito Nieves in Concert    | STX     |
| Nov. 11        | Virgin Gorda Get-A-Way    | STT     |
| Nov. 11-14     | "Seven Guitars" Play      | STT     |
| Nov. 12        | Tito Nieves in Concert    | STT     |
| Nov. 13-15     | Starlab Planetarium       | STX     |
| Nov. 18-19     | Starlab Planetarium       | STT     |
| Nov. 14-15     | VIUCEDD Workshops         | STX     |
| Nov. 16-17     | VIUCEDD Workshops         | STT     |
| Nov. 18        | Microbiology Presentation | STT/STX |

# “Students First” UVI Officials Say

The administration of the University of the Virgin Islands has reaffirmed its commitment to students in its new mission, vision and value statements. And you’ve probably heard the new mantra by now: Students First.

“We know and accept the fact that the students are the one reason for having these institutions on St. Thomas and St. Croix,” said UVI Provost Al Hassan Musah in a recent radio interview with Raul Carrillo on “The Afternoon Mix.” “Everything we’ll be doing in the next 10-12 years will be focused on student learning,” Musah said.

It seems that this commitment is what students have been advocating all along. “We need to show the faculty and staff that we’re the reason why they are here,” said St. Thomas campus



St. Thomas campus Student Government Association senators are sworn in at a Sept. 1 ceremony.

Student Government Association Vice President Alkin Paul, at the officers’ swearing-in ceremony in September.

At the ceremony St. Thomas campus Executive Administrator John D’Orazio assured the students about the administration’s commitment. “When we say that we are putting the students at the center of everything we do, and when I say UVI students first, we really do mean that,” D’Orazio said. “My door

is open,” he continued. “I am here to serve the students.”

Student leaders understand that UVI will realize its mission through cooperation. “It’s not an individual effort that’s going to get things done here at UVI,” St. Thomas campus SGA President Ivan Connor said at the ceremony. “It’s a team effort.”

## Health Continued

STD-HIV-TB programs offer free exams, testing and treatments.

In the case of cancer, getting tested can be the difference between life and death. “We do not know what causes these cancers,” said Dr. Sandra Underwood, referring to breast and prostate cancers, “but if diagnosed early we can treat these cancers.” Dr. Underwood, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, stressed the importance to the many health care professionals in the audience of finding ways to address the existing health disparities.

“We have the opportunity to affect change in people every day,” Dr. Underwood said. “Think about the population we must reach to affect a change in health disparities,” she said.

Dr. Alicia Georges, in an upbeat keynote speech, said that addressing health disparities is the way to eliminating them. “We have to work together to create a new group of leaders . . . and

bring those leaders to the table,” Dr. Georges said. “We have to hold ourselves accountable. That’s the key to changing health disparities.”

The institute, titled “From Science to Service: A Roadmap for Confronting Health Disparities in the U.S. Virgin Islands,” was sponsored by The Caribbean Export Center for Research and Education in Health Disparities. The Export Center was established with a portion of a three-year, \$1.1 million grant UVI received from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in September 2004. The grant funds came from the NIH’s National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities.

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