



Kellogg Health Scholars

Connecting Academe, Community, and Policy

M E E T T H E K E L L O G G H E A L T H S C H O L A R S

Gina L. Evans, Ph.D.

Ask Gina Evans how she became interested in research to decrease health disparities in vulnerable populations. “It was natural,” she answers. “I’m a woman, an African American, and I grew up in a lower-income family.”

She started off in psychology, receiving a master’s degree in Counselor Education and a doctorate in Counseling Education from Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. “I enjoyed providing services to underrepresented individuals through my clinical work,” Evans says, “but I wanted to have a broader societal impact.”

That was why she decided to pursue the Kellogg Health Scholars program. “I saw it as a way to increase my knowledge of health disparities on a local and global level, receive mentorship from experts in the field, and translate my research into practice and policy.” Specifically, Evans’ experience in the Multidisciplinary Track of the program allowed her to deepen and expand her interest in disease management, leading to the preparation of three manuscripts and two applications for funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Next on Evans’ agenda: A tenure-track position as Assistant Professor in the Baylor College of Medicine Chronic Disease Prevention & Control Research Center, offered by one of her Kellogg mentors.

Research and Results

Evans seeks to improve health outcomes by studying social and cultural determinants of health and emotional barriers to health improvement, with emphasis on management of chronic disease. In her earlier research, she explored psychosocial and cultural and determinants of dietary fat consumption among African American women. This study has resulted in the preparation of three manuscripts.

The first reports that higher education and income levels did not seem to protect the study subjects -- mid-life African women -- from poor dietary choices, and discusses the greater importance of support from family members as opposed to friends. This manuscript has been accepted for publication

and is currently in press. Evans was awarded an institutional research travel stipend to present these findings at the national American Psychological Association conference.

The second manuscript details the importance of using contextual factors in conjunction with theoretical variables as a model for understanding eating behaviors among African American women. This manuscript is currently under review.

Evans is currently preparing a third manuscript that examines using acculturation, social support, and health attitudes as a model for understanding eating habits among African American women.

Branching out into self-management, she recently completed a pilot study of a culturally appropriate

behavioral intervention for minority stroke patients. Building on her previous work, she seeks to boost adherence to healthy levels of eating and exercise, medication compliance and tobacco cessation. “The initial analysis shows increased fruit and vegetable consumption and sustained tobacco cessation -- neither easy to achieve,” Evans reports. She is currently conducting an in-depth analysis that will serve as the basis for a NIH K01 career award application.

Using some of the same techniques, Evans is working with the Chief of the Intensive Care Unit at a large county funded urban hospital on an application for a NIH R21 research award. “Patients in the ICU are critically ill and are in need of disease management services,” she explains. “The ICU setting perpetuates heightened feelings of anxiety and depression. In addition, physical/cognitive limitations often prevent ICU patients from caring for themselves, and so caregivers also need help in providing adequate care for their loved ones.” This study will combine the disease self-management intervention with an additional mood management component for ICU patients and caregivers.

Finally, Evans also works with a privately funded effort known as EDICT (Eliminating Disparities in Clinical Trials), developing workshops to improve minority participation into both academic and community research settings.

Policy Implications

Given the potential for disease self-management techniques to overcome racial, ethnic and SES disparities, reduce the burden of chronic illness and improve outcomes, Evans believes it only makes sense to encourage their use. And yet current payment practices still limit reimbursement for many prevention and care management services, increasing out-of-pocket expenses for patients. “Penny-wise and pound-foolish,” she says. “Americans are projected to expend over \$100 billion per year in managing chronic illnesses by the year 2025.” On a national level, her chronic disease

management work can be used to inform Medicare, Medicaid and private health insurance policies. She intends to work with private insurance panels, government personnel and political officials to remedy the situation.

Evans also sees policy implications in her work to make clinical trials more inclusive. Racial and ethnic minorities are frequently excluded from clinical trial research because of purported compliance issues, disease complications, mistrust and lack of knowledge. Adding disease management techniques to clinical trials can help compensate for these problems and improve health outcomes beyond the use of pharmaceuticals alone. She plans to work with policy makers and pharmaceutical companies to encourage the routine use of disease self-management services in chronic disease-related clinical trial research. “If only more people could benefit from these techniques,” she says, “everybody wins.”

To learn more about Gina L. Evans, Ph.D., and her work, contact her at ginae@bcm.edu and/or consult the following publications:

Evans, G. L., McNeil, L. H., Laufman, L., & Bowman, S.L. Determinants of Low-fat Eating Behaviors among Midlife African American Women (Accepted).

Evans, G. L., & Teal, C. R. Contextual Determinants of Eating Habits: An Expansion of the Transtheoretical Model (Under Review).

Evans, G. L., & Cokley, K. O. (2008). African American women and the academy: Using career mentoring to increase research productivity. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 2*(1), pp. 50-57.

Guntupalli, K., Desai, J., **Evans, G. L.,** Varadhachary, G.R., Doshi, T., Mallampalli, A., & Varadhachary, A. Tobacco Use Prevalence and Risk Factors – A Thousand-Child Survey from India (Under Review).

To learn more about the Kellogg Health Scholars Program, contact Barbara Krimgold of the Center for the Advancement of Health at bkrimgold@cfah.org or visit www.kellogghealthscholars.org.