

Cigna Honored at White House for Efforts to Reduce Health Care Disparities

WASHINGTON, August 07, 2012 - Cigna (NYSE:CI) was one of nine organizations that **U.S. Surgeon General Regina Benjamin, MD, MBA**, recognized today for efforts to reduce health care disparities. The recognition came at a special roundtable at the **White House** hosted by the **Department of Health and Human Services**, the **White House Business Council** and the **National Business Group on Health (NBGH)**.

U.S. Surgeon General Regina Benjamin, MD, MBA, presents the Surgeon General's Medallion to leaders of Cigna's Health Disparities Council. Pictured left to right: Peggy Payne, the Surgeon General, Dr. Christina Stasiuk, Brooke Tomblin. (Photo: Cigna)

Dr. Christina Stasiuk, Cigna's national medical director for **health disparities**, accepted the **Surgeon General's Medallion** on behalf of Cigna and its Health Disparities Council, including council co-chair Peggy Payne, M.A., and council lead Brooke Tomblin, MPH. The medallion is awarded in recognition of exceptional achievements that advance the cause of public health and medicine.

Health disparities are differences in rates of disease, health outcomes or access to health care that are related to many factors, such as gender, age, geography, race/ethnicity, education, income, language, culture, literacy, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability. For example, Mexican Americans have nearly twice the rate of **diabetes** compared to the general population, while African American men have 1.5 times the rate of **high blood pressure**. More women will die within one year of their first **heart attack** than men. Health disparities have many causes, including communications barriers, cultural beliefs and practices, medical bias, variations in access to and quality of care, low health literacy and social causes.

"We are honored to accept this award and recognition from the Surgeon General of the United States, and Cigna will continue to advance this important work in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services, the White House Business Council and the National Business Group on Health," said **David Cordani**, Cigna's president and chief executive officer. "We believe that all of the people Cigna serves should have access to high quality care and an equal opportunity to enjoy good health. That's why we're working to remove cultural, linguistic and other barriers, connecting people to meaningful health information and studying new ways to engage people in health improvement. This work reflects Cigna's commitment to diversity and inclusion, and is core to our belief that we must treat each customer as a unique individual."

"We are thrilled and grateful that the Surgeon General has honored Cigna and the other organizations that we have recognized over the past two years for their innovative programs to reduce health disparities," said **Helen Darling**, president and CEO of the National Business Group on Health. "Good health for the entire population is crucial to quality of life, our standard of living, productivity and the nation's overall success. It's especially important that health service companies take an active role in working to reduce health disparities and Cigna's leadership in this area is commendable."

In March, NBGH honored Cigna with its "[Award for Innovation in Reducing Health Care Disparities](#)." Today's event was an opportunity to further recognize Cigna and other organizations that NBGH has honored during the past two years, and it provided an opportunity for these organizations to share their experiences and successes with one another, and discuss ideas for continuing the work to reduce health care disparities.

Cigna launched its Health Disparities Council in 2008. It comprises more than 200 employee volunteers from across the company's departments who facilitate the exchange of ideas, share knowledge, and identify internal and external opportunities to address health care disparities in culturally sensitive and medically appropriate ways.

A key part of Cigna's work has been improving the cultural competency and linguistic sensitivity of its staff. More than 20,000 employees have completed cultural competency training and all bilingual employees are tested for proficiency. The company has also adapted into Spanish and traditional Chinese its "Words We Use" guide for simpler communications.

The company has collaborated with organizations such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's *Finding Answers* program and RAND Corporation to conduct health disparities research. The *Finding Answers* study, which focused on high blood pressure, showed that people respond to health communications that are tailored to them. People enrolled in the study who had slightly elevated blood pressure were far more receptive to the health message than were people with higher blood pressure.

"It gets back to the concept of 'know me as an individual,' which is fundamental to our strategy," Cordani said. "If we're going to be successful at helping people improve their health, we have to reach them at an appropriate time with meaningful messages that relate to their unique status."

Another project focused on reaching Haitian Creoles in South Florida. Cigna's multi-lingual nurse case manager was having difficulty contacting her Haitian customers after they were hospitalized or had a serious medical issue. They would not answer the phone or return phone messages even when the case manager's messages were in French or Creole. The solution was a culturally tailored, colorful and visually appealing pictorial postcard. Simple pictures that conveyed "call your nurse" were supplemented with short messages in French, Creole and English. The result was improved contact between the case manager and her customers, which led to individuals getting appropriate follow-up care and higher levels of health engagement. In addition, the project showed that non-traditional communications can be a successful approach for contacting hard-to-reach populations.

The company is now working with the American Cancer Society to improve rates of colorectal cancer screening among African Americans.

"The issues of health disparities and health equity weren't being adequately addressed five years ago," Cordani said. "The work we've done during that time has built a solid foundation and strong momentum for the work we will continue to do in the years ahead."

About Cigna

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