

Can a Shave and a Haircut Save African-Americans from Colon Cancer?

WASHINGTON, April 23, 2015 - A potentially life-saving program will kick off today in Washington, D.C. amid the buzz of electric razors, hum of blow dryers and scent of shaving cream and hairspray. The University of Maryland's (UMD) School of Public Health's Center for Health Equity, with the Cigna Foundation, will announce the [Health Advocates In-Reach and Research \(HAIR\)](#) program at 11 a.m. at [Christopher's Grooming Lounge](#), 705 H Street NE, followed by a demonstration of how the program works. The goal is to use barbershops and hair salons as gateways to better health for African-Americans, who have the highest rate of new cases of colorectal cancer and are the most likely to die from this disease compared to all other racial groups in the U.S. Washington, D.C. has the highest rate of colorectal cancer deaths in the country, according to a 2011 report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Media who would like to attend today's event are invited to call Brittany Horowitz this morning at 646.229.0213.

"I am very pleased to be a part of the HAIR initiative, partnering with the University of Maryland's Center for Health Equity," said Christopher Bradley, owner-operator of Christopher's Grooming Lounge. "I am even more excited that my staff has the opportunity to add such important value to the lives of our customers. Discussing health issues can always be a sensitive subject, so it is a great idea to be able to receive life-saving health information from our technicians. It just makes sense because the community trusts us."

Stephen B. Thomas, professor of Health Services Administration in the UMD School of Public Health and founding director of the school's Maryland Center for Health Equity (M-CHE), will introduce the HAIR program, funded in part by a \$200,000 grant from the [Cigna Foundation](#) with added support from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities. Through HAIR, barbers and beauticians are trained in how to educate their clientele about colorectal cancer and the importance of getting preventive screenings starting at age 45. The program also includes a team of medical professionals from Capital Digestive Care, LLC, the largest gastroenterology group practice in the Mid-Atlantic states, which will provide medical consultations and colonoscopy screenings to people reached through the HAIR network.

Over the past decade, Dr. Thomas has conducted public health research on mobilizing and transforming African-American barbershops and beauty salons into venues for health promotion, disease prevention and delivery of clinical care in communities at risk for chronic disease. In November, Dr. Thomas [announced the first phase of the grant in Prince George County, Maryland](#). Funding from the Cigna Foundation allowed M-CHE to expand the program in Maryland and now Washington.

"While the Affordable Care Act identified colorectal cancer screening among the preventive services covered at no cost to patients, many people are not having these screenings. This partnership with the Cigna Foundation is recognition that business as usual is not working, and now is the time to invest in new and innovative methods for reaching racial and ethnic minority populations," Dr. Thomas said.

Individuals age 50 and older are most at risk for colorectal cancer, although screening for African-Americans is recommended at age 45. The American Cancer Society estimates that more than 135,000 people will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer this year. In Washington, D.C., the death rate due to colorectal cancer is particularly high among the city's African-American population.

"Family health history, personal history and race are among the common risk factors for colorectal cancer," said Dr. Mary A. Garza, M-CHE associate director and principal investigator for the project. "A unique component of the project will be the family health histories that M-CHE will train counselors to conduct onsite with clients."

Other health experts who will be in attendance today at Christopher's Grooming Lounge to discuss the barbershop program include Dr. Arnold Levy, president and CEO, Capital Digestive Care; Julia Huggins, Cigna's president for the Mid-Atlantic region; Dr. Christina Stasiuk, Cigna's national medical director for health disparities, and Dr. Frank Brown, Cigna's senior medical director for the Virginia-Washington, D.C.-Baltimore area.

"The Cigna Foundation works to nourish culturally sensitive projects that are incubators for innovation," Huggins said. "We're proud to support this initiative, which will make a difference in improving health here in Washington."

The [HAIR project](#) is funded as a part of the Cigna Foundation's World of Difference grants. The Cigna Foundation established the World of Difference grants to tackle health equity challenges by helping people overcome barriers to their health and well-being.

About the University of Maryland Center for Health Equity

The University of Maryland's Center for Health Equity (M-CHE) is a university-wide research initiative, established in September 2010, and based in the university's School of Public Health. It is an NIH designated *Center of Excellence on Race, Ethnicity, and Health Disparities Research*, funded by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities. Its mission is to raise the visibility of racial and ethnic health disparities and implement promising solutions to advance a better state of health through diverse partnerships, programs, and campaigns. M-CHE seeks to establish and sustain a community-engaged research enterprise on critical health disparities to achieve health equity. For more information on M-CHE visit <http://sph.umd.edu/che>.

About the Cigna Foundation

The Cigna Foundation, founded in 1962, is a private foundation funded by contributions from Cigna Corporation (NYSE: CI) and its subsidiaries. The Cigna Foundation is committed to working together with nonprofit organizations that are creating innovative approaches to improving the health and security of individuals and communities everywhere. The Foundation's primary grant making focus is on health equity, with an emphasis on sharing the expertise and energies of Cigna's people with our nonprofit partners.

About Cigna

Cigna Corporation (NYSE: CI) is a global health service company dedicated to helping people improve their health, well-being and sense of security. All products and services are provided exclusively by or through operating subsidiaries of Cigna Corporation, including Connecticut General Life Insurance Company, Cigna Health and Life Insurance Company, Life Insurance Company of North America and Cigna Life Insurance Company of New York. Such products and services include an integrated suite of health services, such as medical, dental, behavioral health, pharmacy, vision, supplemental benefits, and other related products including group life, accident and disability insurance. Cigna maintains sales capability in 30 countries and jurisdictions, and has more than 85 million customer relationships throughout the world. To learn more about Cigna®, including links to follow us on Facebook or Twitter, visit www.cigna.com.

About Capital Digestive Care, LLC

Capital Digestive Care is a group of 59 physicians unified across the Washington Metropolitan Area in their desire to advance the delivery of care for patients suffering from all types of digestive health conditions. Capital Digestive Care offers the greatest collective experience in the area along with the most accessible care. The group's physicians practice at 16 office locations and are affiliated with 15 hospitals and 8 outpatient endoscopy centers, where more than 30,000 colonoscopies are performed each year. For more information, please visit www.capitaldigestivecare.com.

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