

## **Celebrating Black History Month and Diversity in Our Caregiving Community**

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Diversity of Care? What does that truly mean in West Michigan? Racial, ethnic and cultural diversity continues to increase across the United States as well as here in our community. According to the US Census Bureau, the population of Hispanic seniors will grow the fastest, from just over 2 million in 2005 to 15 million in 2050. From 2006 to 2050, the percentage of African-American seniors is estimated to jump from 9 percent to 12 percent. What will our caregiving model look like in 2050 and I wonder what our formal and informal caregiving community is doing now to prepare for this?

Recently while having lunch with a dear friend, our conversation approached just this subject. She commented on the major construction downtown on the Medical Mile project and how much our fabulous city has changed over recent years and the expected growth in healthcare needs in our near future. Diane also commented on our busy lives and the appearance of families relying more on our cultural beliefs and providing greater support to each other in these tough economic times. She shared a caregiving story with me about a multi-generational family who attends her church who are now sharing a home and resources to make ends meet while providing care to two aging parents determined to keep them in their home as long as possible.

After leaving the restaurant, my mind kept returning to this conversation. Since I work for a nonprofit agency supporting such community needs I found myself needing to find out what is currently being done to assess cultural competence and disparities in our current healthcare model in West Michigan. With a quick click of the computer mouse, I was amazed at the wonderful local studies supporting great progress in understanding and acquiring cultural competence in our diverse community.

One such study came from the Grand Rapids African American Health Institute (<http://www.graahi.org/Research/tabid/56/Default.aspx>). Understanding healthcare disparities and differences based on language, gender, race, religion, financial means and genetics while gaining knowledge on values and beliefs will guide future decisions and community action. Success starts with awareness, growth comes with knowledge and understanding, and I believe we all have much to gain by recognizing our differences and cultural competency.

In terms of caregiving, not much has changed in how we become caregivers. Caregiving affects all genders, race, religions and languages. I would say most of the time, we wake up in the morning not thinking today is the day I will become a caregiver. Accidents happen and a quick visit to see the doctor today can change your life tomorrow. I do believe that our family values and beliefs will affect how we respond in this new role and I celebrate our rich community diversity in and outside of the caregiving perspective. I encourage each reader to look around your neighborhood and locate caregiving resources now. Many area churches have a health ministry program. Respite programs provide an added benefit to the caregiver. Support groups create a networking opportunity to gain

knowledge and build friendships. Neighbors may help neighbors. Share your caregiving experiences so that others may learn from you. I am sure your support will be valued and our community made stronger for future generations to come.

In honor of Black History Month, I wanted to list a few websites I found while researching this project that I feel will assist African American caregivers. I also am listing the local Caregivers Resource Network link---we welcome community caregiver stories, provide many valuable resources to family and professional caregivers, and we recently added a Speakers bureau that can address diversity and cultural differences in our caregiving community. Please visit this site today and resolve to not “walk the caregiver path alone”. We value insight from different populations of family caregivers and we believe this will help our program planners, policy makers and formal caregivers develop culturally sensitive programs to support your family and our future community caregivers.

[www.4women.gov/minority/africanamerican](http://www.4women.gov/minority/africanamerican)

[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/africanamericanhealth.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/africanamericanhealth.html)

[www.journeytowellness.com](http://www.journeytowellness.com)

[www.blackhealthcare.com](http://www.blackhealthcare.com)

[www.aahn.com](http://www.aahn.com)

[www.caregiverresource.net](http://www.caregiverresource.net)

*Caregiver's Corner* is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at [www.CaregiverResource.net](http://www.CaregiverResource.net) or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.