



# HEALTHIER BLACK ELDERS CENTER

SPRING 2015

The HBEC encourages older African Americans to participate in approved research.

Research is critical to understanding why African Americans are at much higher risk of developing certain diseases, and why these diseases have a greater impact on their health and longevity. If you agree to be part of the PRP, we guarantee that:

- All research projects meet the highest quality federal, state and university standards.
- Your information will be handled with the strictest confidence.
- You will be considered for research that is of interest to you.
- You have the right to decline a research project for any reason at any time.

## How to Talk to Your Doc

Lots of concerns, little time – that’s what most patients deal with as they meet with their doctor. Our April 23 Lunch & Learn covers the topic in detail, so attend if you can. In the meantime, here are tips for making the most of your 15 minute visit.

**Prepare:** Write down your top three concerns or needs. Flu shot? Medication change? New symptom? Make a list. Consider your hearing and vision needs, too.

**Pack:** Take your current medications with you. Include herbal remedies and supplements, too. If you can’t bring the bottle, write down the name and dosage. Remember your insurance card and the names

and phone numbers of other doctors you’ve seen. Take a pad and pen to write things down.

**Pal:** Bring along a friend or relative to help you remember accurately what your doctor is telling you. Let them know what is most important to you in this visit, so they can help you stay on track.

**Present:** Be clear and concise describing symptoms and concerns. Know when the symptoms started, how long they last, how often they occur, if they are getting worse, and whether they seem related to other activity. Be honest about your habits. If you smoke or drink alcohol, tell the truth about amounts.

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## Energy and Passion for Healthier Black Elders



Seasoned volunteer Patricia Watkins (seated) and LaToya Hall discuss the research database.

LaToya Hall joins the Healthier Black Elders Center as the community outreach specialist overseeing the research database. LaToya, with a master’s degree in social work from Washington University in St. Louis, will supervise the registry of 1,300 participants willing to be contacted about participating in research projects. The database of older, mostly urban African Americans is a critical link in the chain of research to improve the health and well-being of black elders.

“Without sufficient participants, sometimes the research can’t be conducted, or the results are not as vigorous,” LaToya said. “Their voices are needed in these projects. They could represent a group that has previously been missing or under-represented.”

LaToya’s goal is to expand the database to 1,500 active participants, insuring that contact and profile information is accurate.

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HEALTHIER BLACK ELDERS CENTER (HBEC)

University of Michigan and Wayne State University

Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research: A National Institute on Aging Grant Program

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

## Brain Research Needs Your Help

Two important studies of brain function and memory are currently seeking volunteers through the Healthier Black Elders Center Participant Resource Pool (PRP). The first study, directed by IOG faculty member Dr. Jessica Damoiseaux,



*Participants take cognitive tests to assist with research studies.*

is studying older adults who complain that their memory and brain function aren't as good as they used to be. They aren't yet diagnosed with Alzheimer's or dementia, but Dr. Damoiseaux will follow their brain function over the next year or two, to see if their personal sense that there is a problem leads to more significant changes.

The second study, with the IOG's Dr. Voyko Kavcic as well as the Michigan Alzheimer's Disease Center at U-M, is interested in how to identify Alzheimer's changes earlier and more easily than current testing, specifically in African Americans. He is investigating a low-cost, portable method to iden-

tify these brain changes. The EEG (electroencephalograph) is a non-invasive monitor of electrical activity in the brain. He will combine it with cognitive tests to try to determine who might be most at risk for developing Alzheimer's.

Early identification would allow people to receive treatment and resources. African Americans are twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's as their Caucasian counterparts, but far less likely to receive early diagnosis and treatment.

If you are interested in volunteering for these or other important research projects, please call the PRP office at 313-664-2604. If you aren't already a member of our special Participant Resource Pool, our volunteers can explain the program and how you can help. To learn more about the study with Dr. Kavcic, see the recruitment announcement at right.

### Doc Talk from page 1

**Plan:** Ask your doctor what will happen next. What tests will occur? How will the results be shared? What is your responsibility? Can instructions be in writing to make it easier for you to remember? Your doctor is your wellness partner – not a drill sergeant. He or she can't force you to make healthy changes. Only you can do that.

Last but not least, **Be Patient.** Your doctor may not be able to cover all your concerns in one visit, so schedule a follow-up appointment. If you have a medication or lifestyle change, give it time to work. A sudden important question could be answered by a phone call to the office nurse or physician's assistant. Take the time to make every appointment count, and you can reap the reward of better health.



### Seeking Volunteers for A Research Study

The University of Michigan and Wayne State University are conducting a study using sophisticated testing approaches to better understand the potential signs that predict continued cognitive loss and even the earliest potential signs of Alzheimer's disease.

We are seeking African-American participants both male and female, ages 65 and over.

Eligible volunteers will undergo:

- EEG/ERP
- Clinical Neurological Assessments
- Memory Testing
- Gait & Balance Test

*Participants will receive compensation for study participation.*

INVESTIGATORS:

**Bruno Giordani, PhD**  
Department of Psychology,  
University of Michigan  
**Voyko Kavcic, PhD,**  
Institute of Gerontology  
Wayne State University

**Contact Study Coordinator:**

Stephen Campbell at  
(734) 763-2361  
or  
stepcamp@umich.edu

## Is it Safe to Microwave in Plastic?

At a recent Lunch & Learn, we had many questions about using plastic containers to heat food in microwave ovens. Will dangerous chemicals leach from the plastic into the food – and then into us? Despite many messages warning us that cancer-causing toxins will contaminate our food, the answer is not that simple.



### What's Plastic Made Of?

Two substances in plastic are cause for concern: BPA which is added to make plastic hard, and phthalates added to make plastic soft and flexible. In our bodies, these chemicals disrupt hormones and can cause diseases like infertility and cancer. (Dioxin is also a byproduct of plastic but only if it is burned, so you should never have to worry about ingesting dioxin from microwaved food.) When food is wrapped in plastic or heated in a plastic container, BPA and phthalates can leak into the food. Fatty foods like meats and cheeses absorb more of these toxins than other types of food.

### What Plastic is Safe?

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) closely regulates plastic containers and tests those labeled as “microwave safe.” The standards for passing the tests are high. The maximum amount of chemicals that could be passed from plastic to food is 100 to 1,000 times LESS per pound of body weight than the

amount shown to harm laboratory animals over a lifetime of use. Good Housekeeping also independently tested 31 plastic containers, lids and wraps and found that almost none of the food cooked in them contained plastic additives.

All in all, any plastic container labeled as “Microwave Safe” will not cause a health hazard. Foods packaged to be cooked in the microwave (like Lean Cuisine) are also safe. A plastic container with no label is not necessarily harmful; it just hasn't been evaluated by the FDA. To be on the safe side, don't use those containers in the microwave. Transfer the food to a glass container for heating. Don't ever heat food in plastic wrap. It is thin and can easily get hot enough to melt into your food. Wax paper, parchment or paper towels are a better, safer choice.

### How about Styrofoam?

Styrofoam, used in coffee cups, take-out containers and certain disposable plates, contains styrene, a suspected cancer-causing chemical. Though considered safe for storing cold foods, these foam containers can leach styrene into food when heated. A product contains styrene if the number 6 is inside the recycling triangle on the bottom. Avoid heating foods in styrofoam when possible. You'll protect your health and the environment. We generate 20 million pounds of styrene waste each year, clogging landfills and waterways where it becomes a major choking hazard for sea birds and marine animals.

*For more info, see “Dangers of Heating Food in Plastic” by Florence Williams, Good Housekeeping, 2015; and “Microwaving Food in Plastic: Dangerous or Not?” Harvard Medical School, Feb. 1, 2006.*

## Energy from page 1

Research projects are approved through a community advisory board prior to giving researchers access to the database members. Right now, 157 members are in studies, with 10 projects actively recruiting. “Most of the studies are non-invasive and require only an interview or questionnaire,” LaToya said. “And many offer a financial incentive for participating. Members also have the right to refuse to participate in any study too. They are under no obligation.”

In addition to her work with the Participant Resource Pool, LaToya will design educational workshops for Detroit's black elders. She has a special interest in financial issues. “Few organizations are providing fi-

nancial education to seniors,” she said. “I think we can help to fill that gap and teach financial literacy and how to protect themselves from scams and exploitation.”

Being able to interact with elders is a major benefit of her position. LaToya enjoys Detroit's older African Americans because of the rich history of their experiences. “I was talking to an older gentleman last week,” she said. “Martin Luther King, Jr., gave his first ‘I have a dream’ speech here in Detroit. This man heard him. He was there. Reading about history in a book is fine, but talking to someone who actually lived it is amazing.”

*To learn more about joining the Participant Resource Pool, call 313-664-2604.*

## Lunch & Learn

## Save the Date

*These events are all FREE but you must register to attend by calling Donna MacDonald at 313-664-2605.*

### **Thursday, April 23**

*Making the Most of Your Doctor's Appointment, and  
Joint Health: Head, Shoulders, Knees & Toes*

**Boulevard Temple Care Center, 2567 W. Grand Blvd, Detroit 48208**

9 am: **FREE** Blood pressure, blood sugar and memory screenings

10 am – Noon: Learn tips and tricks for getting your questions answered and understanding what your physician is saying during appointments. Also learn how to cope with joint pain. Lunch follows.

### **Tuesday, May 19**

*Memory and Brain Changes as We Age*

**U-M Detroit Campus, 3663 Woodward Ave., Detroit 48201**

9 am: **FREE** Blood pressure, blood sugar and memory screenings

10 am – Noon: Discuss lifestyle choices and environmental changes we can make to keep our brain working at an optimal level. Lunch follows.

### **Tuesday, June 9**

*The Science behind Aging*

9 am: **FREE** Blood pressure, blood sugar and memory screenings

**Northwest Activities Center, 18100 Meyers Detroit, 48235**

10 am – Noon: Highly respected researchers explain how to incorporate changes to our environment and lifestyle for better health in our golden years. Lunch follows.

## Lunch & Learns Expand

Followers of the Healthier Black Elders Center know that for more than a decade, we hosted upwards of 500 people at a large June event to honor all who helped us with research.

This year, though, instead of one large event, we're holding several smaller, intimate Lunch & Learns around the city. We hope to reach residents who were unable to attend the June celebration due to timing or transportation.

Lunch & Learns present topics by expert speakers. The smaller crowds of 60-100 people allow for more discussion and questions. Find a Lunch & Learn near you and join us for a free lunch and health screenings plus interesting information to keep you healthy.