

Dying too young: the unfortunate of Black male health disparities

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(In memory of my cousin, "Nathaniel")

There was a time in our country when one could easily understand the obstacles that contributed to Blacks not receiving adequate attention or resources to maintain quality health and long life. However, in 2009 it can only be described as sad that the health statistics and life expectancy for Black Americans still lags so far behind other groups. Even more unfortunate is the fact that the statistics for Black men are worse than for their female counterparts. The all too sad truth is that many Black men are dying far too young, due to the devastating health disparities they experience.

Last week, I received a call with news that my 61 year-old second cousin had died from complications of cancer. His sister said, "I thought he would live longer than our parents (who died at 69 and 81) since he had so many advantages

they never had."

In many ways, my cousin Nathaniel would be considered a "good Black man," the type of guy from the neighborhood we can all be proud of. He was the oldest of four children, a protective yet caring brother to his three younger sisters. He set the example by being the first person in his family to graduate from college. He served in the military and returned to a teaching career. He received several honors for his teaching contributions to the lives of the young people he worked with.

It was while reading an article celebrating his teaching achievements that I learned he grew up in poverty. As a child, my father sent my brother and me to his relatives in Knoxville, Tennessee. In my childhood memory there was nothing that I saw, heard, or experienced that felt like poverty. To the contrary, it felt like love, care and lots of fun. Central to the good times was my cousin Nathaniel because he listened to Motown, took us to the

amusement parks, went swimming with us and had cool teenage friends.

What happened to this man who made the best of opportunities presented to him, worked hard, made positive contributions to his family, community, and country? When it came to taking care of his own health, he stopped short of doing the right things. To every good Black man and those who want to become one, here are a few things you can do to get healthy and live longer:

1. When it comes to your health, don't be so independent. See your doctor yearly and follow up on the recommendations.
2. Don't be afraid to change. You can stop smoking, drinking, over-eating and depending on drugs.
3. Acknowledge and take note when your body is in pain. Admitting pain is a strength, not a weakness. The body will give you lots of warning signs before it stops working.
4. Encourage another Black man to live a healthy life. Eat well, get rest, and exercise.



5. Don't let the negative images of others towards Black men become your reality. Love yourself enough to take care of yourself and make good decisions.

6. Remember we want and need you to live. Premature death hurts everyone.

Today, we have more power and access to health resources than any previous generation. Unfortunately, my cousin's sister is right. This good black man should have taken better care of himself, so he could still be around for us to be proud of.

The 84' Celebrates Youth Talent to Stomp Out Tobacco Use in Massachusetts



Three talented youth of Sociedad Latina in Mission Hill were recently honored as winners of "The 84" Digital Media Contest, "Brand You". Anthony Price, also a Mission Hill High School student, took the Grand Prize for his rap song entitled Live Life. Soto and Yorling Valdez were honored for composing an original rap song about tobacco use among their peers and its impact on the community. "The 84" is a statewide tobacco prevention movement developed by and for young people in Massachusetts. The campaign references the 84% of 7th-12th graders in MA who don't smoke, and engage in other creative, healthy activities.