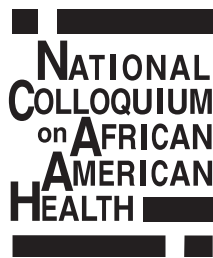


Promoting Prevention of Viral Hepatitis in the African American Community



National Medical Association



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ISSUE: Although viral hepatitis (A, B, and C) disproportionately affects the African American community, African Americans routinely underutilize immunization, screening, and treatment services. Particularly at issue is the dearth in services to African American youth who often have multiple risk factors for contracting viral hepatitis. Immunizations have been primarily deemed a preventive tool for children; this misconception has led to increased vulnerability among black adolescents and adults for these preventable and treatable diseases. The NMA believes that too few African Americans are aware of their susceptibility to the hepatitis A, B, and C viruses (HAV, HBV, and HCV). In addition, their underutilization and limited access to the vaccine for HAV and HBV, coupled with the often early onset of behaviors that increase a person's risk of contracting viral hepatitis exemplify the need to promote prevention in the African American community.

OBJECTIVE: To examine the prevalence of viral hepatitis among African American youth and adults, to identify the social, cultural, and structural barriers to immunization and screening services among African Americans, and to recommend relevant policy changes to close the gap in prevention, immunization, and treatment services rendered to the African American community.

CONSENSUS PROCESS: A literature review that examined contemporary knowledge of viral hepatitis, including issues of prevalence among African Americans, was conducted. A draft paper was submitted to the hepatitis consensus panel to review and expand upon when it convened in June, 2001. The consensus panel created a list of topics to

elaborate on, including a broader focus of the three primary forms of viral hepatitis; keeping in accord with current NMA immunization recommendations; coinfection with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), chronic liver diseases, sexually transmitted disease, educational and disease prevention programs.

OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction
- II. Overview of Hepatitis A, B, and C
- III. Racial and Ethnic Disparities
- IV. Epidemiology and Transmission of Hepatitis A, B and C
- V. Risk Factors and Settings
- VI. Prevention Strategies
- VII. Conclusion
- VIII. Recommendations

I. INTRODUCTION

The National Medical Association (NMA) is the oldest and largest national organization representing African American physicians and health professionals in the United States and the Caribbean. Established in 1895, the NMA is the collective voice of more than 25,000 African American physicians and the patients they serve. Since its inception, the NMA has been committed to improving the health status and outcomes of minority and disadvantaged people. Throughout its history, the National Medical Association has focused primarily on health issues related to African Americans and medically underserved populations, however, its principles, goals, initia-