

Kathleen Russell, DNS, RN

Improving the health status of racial and ethnic minority populations has been and continues to be the focus of my professional career and personal endeavors. Since the factors contributing to minority health disparities are complex and multifaceted, my nursing career has taken several overlapping directions, including clinical and community practice, health policy and advocacy, teaching, and research.

I had not been exposed to the magnitude of health problems in minority communities until I took a position at Wishard Memorial Hospital on a medical floor, shortly after graduating from a diploma nursing school at Miami Valley Hospital in Dayton, Ohio. At Wishard, patients were frequently admitted and readmitted to my floor with chronic illnesses that were not under control due to a variety of personal, family, economic, and system reasons. During that time, I also enrolled at Indiana University School of Nursing and completed a baccalaureate of science in nursing degree. My undergraduate education introduced me to the real world of public health and opened my eyes to the issues that urban minority neighborhoods and communities faced as they attempted to maintain healthy households. I was part of these neighborhoods and became determined to work towards making a difference in the health of minority people by effecting change at a community level from a prevention standpoint. Thus, I joined the ranks of public health nursing after graduation and soon enrolled part time in the masters of science in nursing degree program at Indiana University, majoring in community health nursing. I also worked full time as a public health nurse at the Marion County Health Department.

In the masters degree program I learned how to organize communities to deal with their health issues and I developed an appreciation of the power of politics and public policy for instituting change within communities. In the late 1980's I was able to put this knowledge into practice by working one year as a minority health consultant for Dr. Woodrow Myers, former State Health Commissioner, and later as a doctoral student and public health advocate in leading a statewide minority community effort in the elimination of minority health disparities. The former Secretary of Health and Human Services, Margaret Heckler, report on black and minority health had been released in 1986 and served as the catalyst for communities of color to rally around the widening gap in health status that existed between minorities and non-minorities. Under Dr. Myers's administration, I initiated the development of a statewide network of minority health coalitions that still exist today and are continuing to grow. In 1988 the coalitions formed an umbrella organization, the Indiana Minority Health Coalition, and elected me as its first president. As President, I collaborated with the Indiana Black Legislative Caucus and the Indiana State Department of Health towards the enactment of the Minority Health Initiatives. The statute mandated

that issues related to minority health disparities are addressed through research, education, and practice.

In 1993 I completed my doctoral degree in community health and health policy from Indiana University School of Nursing. This education provided me not only with skills in the health policy arena under the direction of Drs. Beverly Flynn and Joanne Martin but also grounded me in behavioral science research under the mentorship of Dr. Victoria Champion.

My initial program of research involved investigating childhood injuries. In my prior experience as a public health nurse walking the streets of Indianapolis, making home visits, and working in immunization and well baby clinics, I found children in families who were at high risk for injury. This concern was validated by an early epidemiological study I conducted on injury related deaths in young children in Marion County. Often the coroner records described a lack of understanding on the part of parents/caregivers about how the injury could have been prevented. Furthermore, both state and national data demonstrated that African American children had a higher proportion of preventable injuries than white children. For my dissertation, I investigated maternal knowledge, health beliefs, and social influence in injury prevention behaviors for preschool children with inner city mothers. Subsequent research in this area involved an NIH funded grant to identify behavioral predictors of repeat childhood injuries in a national sample of mothers.

As the minority health coalitions began initiating programs in their communities, I expanded my behavioral research investigations in the mid 1990's to include evaluating outcomes of coalition driven health programs. I also was teaching community health nursing at Ball State University, exposing undergraduate students to minority health issues and involving them in the coalition projects. My research included measuring behavioral outcomes of health and social services utilization and identifying barriers to care.

Last fall I began a new program of behavioral research in cancer control at IU School of Nursing. Under the mentorship of Dr. Victoria Champion, I am investigating cultural influences on breast cancer screening in African American women. Culture may play a role in how African Americans perceive their cancer risks and what they may or may not do to engage in behaviors to decrease these risks. This knowledge will add to our existing knowledge about health benefits and sociopolitical, economic, and other contextual factors that affect breast cancer screening rates in African American women. Study findings also will be used to develop culturally tailored health messages aimed at increasing the initiation and repetition of breast cancer screening in African American women. My ultimate goal is to expand investigations of cultural factors that may be related to breast cancer screening and prevention in African American women to other types of cancer in African Americans.

Amelia Project Grant Awarded

The Catherine Peachey Fund, Inc. is proud to announce the recipients of the Amelia Project Grant. They are: **Kathy Miller, M.D.** of Indiana University, **Michael S. Kinch, Ph.D.** of Purdue University, and **David Riese, Ph.D.** also of Purdue University. Their proposal is entitled, Breast Cancer Imaging with

EphA2-Directed Aptamers. The long range goal of the study is to identify new markers and therapeutic targets in breast cancer.

Laser Capture Microdissection

The recently acquired Arcturus Laser Capture Microdissection (LCM) is now available for use. This instrument allows investigators to precisely separate exactly the cell population desired from histologic sections for pinpoint molecular analysis. The instrument was purchased using funds from the IU Cancer Center, multiple departments, and RIF. It is available for use by any investigator from IU School of Medicine or IUPUI. It is located in the Department of Pathology at the VA Medical Center, Room A2133. Further information can be obtained from:

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