MITIGATING HEALTH DISPARITIES: A NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT

Daniel F. Sarpong

Center for Minority Health & Health Disparities for Research & Education. College of Pharmacy, Xavier University of Louisiana, 1 Drexel Drive, New Orleans, LA 70125

Abstract: Even after great strides in human and economic capital to close the gap, significant disparities in the burden of disease and illness experienced by different groups still persists. The approach to solve the health disparities paradox has moved from just dissecting the biology of the problem to understanding the interplay between the social, cultural, biological, behavioral, economic, and neighborhood factors. However, the goal has not been reached because an old paradigm is still being used. After 30 years since the Heckler Report - Report of the Secretary’s Task Force on Black and Minority Health, and despite the wealth of data about racial and ethnic minority health and health inequities that have been generated and the advances in our knowledge of the major underlying factors of health disparities, the gap still persist. A new paradigm shift is needed to effectively and adequately address health disparities in our nation. In a recent article by Dankwa-Mullin and Maddox, it was articulated that the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) will embark on a bold vision that will challenge researchers to employ newer, innovative strategies and ideas to address and solve health disparities. In support of that concept this presentation is a call to action for a new paradigm shift in addressing health disparities and it provides provocative questions, data and approaches to addressing health disparities going forward. The need is urgent for a new tapestry of addressing health disparities which include collaborative science, reframing of the questions and hypotheses, new analytic approaches, socio-cultural factors that address both personal and societal responsibilities, political will, and basic common-sense approaches.

Key words: Health Disparities, Paradigm Shift, Minority Health,

Acknowledgements: This research is partially supported by the Grant, 5 S21 MD 000100-12, from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD), National Institutes of Health (NIH), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).