We need a national campaign to destigmatize mental illness, especially one targeted toward African Americans...It's not shameful to have a mental illness. Get treatment. Recovery is possible.

-Bebe Moore Campbell, 2005 (Source: National Alliance on Mental Illness)

July is National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month, when the nation turns its attention to the behavioral health needs of racial and ethnic groups that are less likely to receive adequate treatment than the general population. The month of July was designated as Bebe Moore Campbell National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month by a Congressional resolution in 2008 because of Ms. Campbell’s vigorous efforts in helping to bring more attention to the causes and effects of mental illness, especially within minority communities.

An accomplished journalist and best-selling author, the Philadelphia-born Campbell became intimately aware of the debilitating effects of mental illness when she struggled to help a family member coping with bipolar disorder. She wrote about her experiences in her 2005 novel, 72 Hour Holds, hoping to increase public awareness of how people who suffer with mental illness are not menaces to society. She co-founded a chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in Inglewood, California, and worked to reduce negative associations with mental illness among African Americans. Campbell died in 2006 from complications with brain cancer.

Years after the Surgeon General’s 1999 landmark report on Minority Mental Health, racial and ethnic minorities continue to face disparities in treatment of mental illnesses and face unique challenges relating to mental health care. According to the Office of Minority Health (OMH) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), even though African Americans are 20 percent more likely to experience serious mental health problems than the general population, they are half as likely to receive services. When they do receive services, treatment is likely to be of lower quality because of issues of availability and cultural competence.

Bebe Moore Campbell National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month is a time to learn about the many initiatives that have been started by the HHS Action Plan to Reduce Racial and
Ethnic Disparities, including National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care (National CLAS Standards) developed by the Office of Minority Health (OMH). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA’s) Office of Behavioral Health Equity and its Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) were created to address these issues and enhance the development of a more diverse and sensitive behavioral health workforce who can provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

We’d like to hear from you!

Send us your nominations for MFPCC Fellow of the Month, your questions, or your suggestions for additional resources, to mfpcc@dsgonline.com.

Visit your MFPCC website!

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