Equity advocate

“Don’t feel respected … My doctor doesn’t seem to take me seriously … No, I’m not stressed out. No, I’m not depressed … It’s not all in my head … Something’s not right with my body, but no one seems to be listening to me.”


“African-American women have some of the highest rates of illness and death across population groups,” she said in an interview. For example:

- African-American women ages 35 to 44 years have a breast cancer death rate twice that of white women in the same age group.
- African-American women with coronary artery disease (CAD) have a death rate from CAD that is 69 percent higher than the rate for white women, and
- African-American women with hypertension die from the disease at a rate that is 352 percent higher than it is for white women with the condition.

She goes on to explain that many factors contribute to the poor outcomes. Most concerning, is the perception that physicians and other health care providers don’t take African-American women’s health concerns seriously; that their conditions are more likely to be misdiagnosed or underdiagnosed than those of other women; and that they may not be offered the same treatment options as others. As an example, she cites one study that showed African-American women were significantly less likely to be referred for cardiac catheterization than white men.

“The purpose of the book isn’t to place blame,” she says. Rather, it’s to build awareness and encourage all women to advocate for themselves when it comes to their health.

Morgan’s inspiration came from her own experience as a patient. She recalls how the tone of clinic visits changed once her doctor and the staff found out she was a physician. “I felt my concerns were taken more seriously once I revealed I was a physician.” She later heard similar stories from other African-American women who either were physicians themselves or had relatives or friends in medicine.

Morgan says her desire to make health care more equitable extends to her work with MHP, which serves Hennepin County residents enrolled in state-sponsored health programs (Medical Assistance, MinnesotaCare).

“In general, I try to be mindful of health equity,” she says, explaining that MHP has a very diverse community of members. “About 40 percent have mental health issues or chemical dependency issues. It’s important to be mindful of those factors affecting health as we make decisions about care.”