Workshop 3E
An Ounce of: Reducing Inequities in Health through Prevention

Moderator/Panelists: Paula Parker-Sawyers, Director, Outreach and Partnerships, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unwanted Pregnancy, Washington, D.C.

Presenters: Larry Leflore, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Family Sciences, Texas Woman’s University, Denton, TX
Sharon Rabb, Ph.D., CEO and Founder, Center for the Empowerment of Families, Inc. Los Angeles, CA

For this session, Dr. Larry Leflore defined health literacy as, “the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process and understand the basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.” Health care “consumers” need to evaluate information for credibility; analyze the risks and benefits of a plan of care; calculate dosages; interpret test results; and find information on their own. Having a low level of health literacy can impede communication, contribute to sub-standard care and impair treatment. Dr. Leflore outlined ways to improve health literacy especially among those most at risk:

1) Remove cultural barriers
2) Train health care providers in communication and cultural literacy
3) Check for patient understanding
4) Consider labeling to make comparisons of health plans easier
5) Promote health care literacy through research, intervention strategies and media

Dr. Sharon Rabb highlighted the importance of promoting preventative mental health services. Only one third of Americans with mental health problems get care. Many who need care the most are “voiceless” -- the homeless, young children and the elderly. There is a need to reduce the social stigma associated with mental health issues. Youth need to be taught that health includes mental health and that each person is responsible for self care. People need to be taught to ask questions and become their own advocates. She suggested health care oriented groups could be offered in faith communities (this might be a good way to reach African Americans.) Only 2% of psychologists or psychiatrists and 4% of social workers are African American.