

Pastor Project Builds Cancer Awareness

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Dr. Paul Friedlander knew he had to do something. Since Hurricane Katrina, he was seeing African American patients with more advanced head and neck cancers than before. African Americans have a mortality rate twice that of other groups for those cancers.



Dr. Paul Friedlander, center, and Tulane colleague Vanessa Landry, left, screen a patient for head and neck cancers. They are working with community leaders to build awareness about these diseases. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The chair of the Tulane Department of Otolaryngology, [Friedlander](#) teamed up with colleague Vanessa Landry and leaders of the African American community to start working on the problem. As one example, the [Tulane Cancer Center](#) is planning to offer free oral, head and neck cancer screenings on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Jan. 17, from 10 a.m. until noon, when a Tulane mobile clinic will be at the intersection of Claiborne Avenue and Martin Luther King Boulevard.

“Vanessa and I shared a frustration in that the tumors we deal with are typically very visible,” says Friedlander. “We thought there must be something we could do to encourage people to see their doctors sooner.”

That's when Landry, a physician assistant in the Department of Surgery who also is a pastor in the African American community, reached out to religious and other African American leaders.

The feedback from those leaders was positive, and the group has been meeting and making plans, such as addressing access to dental services. Dental hygienists help screen for head and neck cancers. In addition, many cancer patients have poor dental health and need extractions before treatment can begin.

“Partnership ? that's really the key word here,” says Friedlander.

While the religious leadership agreed to look for resources, Friedlander spoke with “our partners at the Louisiana State University Dental School, who were immediately engaged and committed to helping us solve this problem.”

Friedlander says he hopes the project can expand to address disparities that curtail the availability of treatment of other diseases. Long-term, he wants to work with public health colleagues and develop a study on barriers to health care that would use “the potential and the power of this group of pastors.”

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