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## BET Conference aims to help African-American women improve their health

**Kimberly Hayes Taylor / Detroit News Health Writer**

BET Foundation officials believe if anyone has the power to help family members get healthier, it's the woman in the house.

That's why the organization is bringing the BET Foundation Women's Health Symposium, Remembering Our Health, to Detroit for the first time Saturday.

"Our women's health symposium was designed to educate African-American women on how to better care for themselves because we've realized when it comes to health disparities, the leading person that can influence health disparities is the African-American female," says Debra Kilpatrick, director of women's health programs for the Washington, D.C.-based BET Foundation Inc.

The event, which is free but requires registration, runs from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday at the Wayne State University Community Arts Auditorium and Student Center. It features Grammy-winning gospel great Vickie Winans as emcee and a special performance by R&B songstress Deborah Cox during the 3 p.m. plenary session.

Winans says she's participating in the event because she knows how difficult it is to live a healthy lifestyle.

"So many people are sick, and all we hear is healthcare, healthcare. But when the rubber meets the road and at the end of the day, we have to eat better, learn our bodies and try our best to maintain a healthy lifestyle," Winans says. "It's hard because chocolate, ice cream and fast food are off the chain. But we don't have to eat it everyday. Eat your fruits and vegetables and get your checkups."

Women will have a chance to get clinical breast exams and other checkups at the symposium, which also will feature healthy lifestyle workshops, panel discussions, cooking demonstrations and a variety of health screenings, such as blood pressure checks and vision tests.

Speakers include Michigan Surgeon General Dr. Kimberlydawn Wisdom, who will discuss improving healthy outcomes as keynote speaker; Carol Gist-Stramler, former (and the first black) Miss USA, will lead a morning workout. Other speakers will discuss topics ranging from clinical trials and diabetes to health aging and fitness, and oral health and chronic disease.

Nearly 2,000 women already have registered for the event, and BET officials hope at least 2,500 Metro Detroiters will attend the four-city tour that kicked off in Jacksonville, Fla., in March and will end Oct. 31 in Jackson, Miss. BET Foundation has hosted symposiums for the last six years, and selects four cities each year with health disparities. The group teamed up with the Detroit Department of Health and other organizations to host the event, which is co-sponsored by Wayne State University, the Detroit Department of Wellness Promotion and General Mills.

Stephanie L. Jones, who got speakers and vendors for the Detroit event, says the symposium is important, especially when so many women have lost health insurance.

"This is an opportunity to get many free health screenings that they otherwise would not have the money to pay for," says Jones, author of the Amazon.com and Essence best-selling book, "The Enemy Between My Legs" (Stephanie L. Jones, \$12.95), and a sexual-abuse victim advocate.

The 33-year-old Detroit resident will speak about the link between sexual abuse -- which reportedly impacts one in three American women and one in five American men -- and substance abuse and other health issues. Jones, who was sexually abused, says she tried to quell her pain with emotional eating. She will autograph copies of her book and offer them at a discounted \$10.

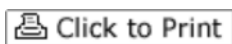
After experiencing a mini stroke early last year, Jones also emphasizes the importance of free health screenings. Before her stroke, she was warned after a screening that she was at high risk for a stroke and should get herself checked out. She did -- but only after she was rushed to the hospital with paralysis on one side of her face.

"I stayed there a total of eight days. Not only that, they discovered I have a heart block and a hole in my heart," Jones says. "When the opportunity is there to get free health screenings, take advantage of it."

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