

CHJ TODAY

The official newsletter of the Center for Health Justice



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Mind, Yours: Mental Health in the Black Community

by Jair Walker

They say that your mind is your most powerful tool. With the current state of the world, that tool is becoming increasingly damaged. Juggling the stresses of everyday life with this never-ending virus is a tough task. Believe it or not, that task can potentially be made even more difficult depending on the color of your skin.

For starters, black Americans are infected with COVID-19 at a rate nearly 3 times that of white Americans. According to this study by John Hopkins University, black Americans are also twice as likely to die from the virus. So, is Miss Corona a racist? Not exactly. There are a lot of other things that factor into this statistic. Black and Brown communities are more likely to have pre-existing medical conditions, multi-generational households, and a lack of

accessible health care. Now, is that racist? Maybe.

Going on 3 years, this pandemic has made many of us more anxious, depressed, and traumatized. It has made us lonelier as well. Domestic violence numbers are constantly rising. And on top of all that, social injustices continue to be prevalent. So, how do you fight both a virus and the struggles of everyday life? Hibernate! Literally sleep through the entire pandemic and wake up when it's over. Although it's not that simple, sleep actually does help. In fact, there's plenty of things you can do to get your mind right during these difficult times. Here are just a few:

- **Eat Healthy:** This is a lot easier said than done, depending on your location. If you can manage, swap out one fruit or veggie for one piece of junk food in your daily diet. Remember, you put out what you put in.

Community Resources for February

Free Therapy for Black Individuals

Free Black Therapy: contact@freeblacktherapy.org//
IG: freeblacktherapy

Free Outdoor WIFI

LA County Libraries: check out their website to see available locations// (626) 394-4019 (TEXT ONLY)

Free Re-Entry Related Legal Help

Root & Rebound: Info@rootandrebound.org// (510) 279-4662

- **Exercise:** Dance around the house. Walk to the fridge. Chase the cat. Just move! Exercising releases positive endorphins that makes your mind happier.
- **Get Some Sleep:** Whatever you're doing at 2AM probably isn't holy anyways. Get 7-9 hours and your mind will thank you.
- **Talk to Friends and Family:** No matter how independent you think you are; we are social beings who need outside connection. Also, don't be afraid to be vulnerable. No, that's not gay. Don't be homophobic.
- **Seek Therapy:** Therapy is cool, don't let anybody tell you differently. With proper research, you can find a therapist that is just right for your current situation. If you think therapy is lame, you probably need it. And that's okay! Don't be a chicken. Get some help.



Free Birth Certificate for the Homeless

LA County Department of Mental Health:
cheerd@dmh.lacounty.gov// (800) 854-7771

Free Food Services

My Friends House INC: 3533 W. 58th Pl.,
Los Angeles// (323) 292-4939

Hollypark UMC Outreach Program: 13000
S. Van Ness Blvd., Gardena// (310) 516-6457

Interview with a UCLA Med Student

Jair: What's goin on brotha? Thank you for joining me for our 2nd official CHJ interview. Why don't you just start by telling everybody about yourself.

Brandon: Yeah, so I guess just to start off, my name is Brandon. I'm currently a first-year medical student at UCLA. My story started, I was born in Chicago, but actually moved to SoCal in a city called Chino Hills. That's actually where I met Jair. I spent a lot of my childhood out there. And I guess I'll just kind of leave it at that for now. I'm sure we'll dig in deeper and learn a lot more about me as we kind of go through this.

Jair: Cool, so this is your first year in medical school. Would you like to talk about your experience so far as a medical student at UCLA?

Brandon: Yeah, I've only been in school since August, so about six months now. I've already seen so many cool things. Even early on, they give you exposure to a full cadaver lab. So, you know, that's part of our anatomy training. They have you go and study all the different parts of the body, learn where everything is, so to say. Also, as medical students, they make a joke, when we go to orientation that, we get our badge. They say that it opens doors for you. Both metaphorically and literally. And by that, I mean, obviously, you can use it to get into areas on campus. But also, just being a medical student, allows you to just get exposure to so many different areas of medicine. You could quite literally send an email to any of the doctors that work for UCLA and be shadowing with them the next day. You can be following them around, seeing what type of work they do, and



Young Jair and Brandon. From breaking ankles to repairing them.

see if that's, you know, a possible career path for you. Already, I've shadowed a couple surgeries. I've been in the OR [Operating Room] and shadowed in the emergency department. I'm just getting a lot of exposure, and I'm looking forward to shadowing a kidney transplant next week.

Jair: So, with all of that newly acquired knowledge, what would you say is like the best piece of advice that you can share with a non-medical person right now?

Brandon: Well, right now we just finished learning a whole lot about the heart. So, if I had one piece of advice that could go a long way, is just get like 30 minutes of physical activity per day. And it doesn't even have to be anything serious. Just like go outside and get some fresh air and walk around the neighborhood. And that's been shown to add years onto your life. Just that little thing alone. So highly recommend, if possible, get out, get some fresh air, and

just walk around. Doesn't even have to be you know, like, running miles.

Jair: That's perfect. Walking is pretty much my body's exercise limit. Good to know. Well since the month of February is Black History Month, I was wondering if there's any piece of knowledge relevant to black and minority health that is important to know, especially right now with COVID and whatnot?

Brandon: In regard to COVID, I would just say to continue to protect yourself in whatever form that may be. Whether that is getting vaccinated, whether that is consistently masking up and you know, sanitizing, hand washing, whatever it is, because COVID is a real disease. It is in fact, killing many people. Working in hospitals and community clinics, I see a lot of this stuff firsthand. So, I would just say continue to fight this thing. If you have any questions or hesitancy about getting vaccinated, just talk to your doctor. They're trained in this type of stuff. Any questions or concerns you may have they'll probably be able to answer those. So that's that in regard to



The face of a future Doctor, Brandon Williams

COVID I would say because, black and brown communities, if you look at the statistics are just being disproportionately affected by this thing. It's something that needs to be addressed. So hopefully we continue to trend in the right direction, in terms of getting people vaccinated and just continuing to do the best that we can to end this thing.

Jair: Yeah, I know from at least what I've seen in the black community, there's a lot of like mistrust about receiving vaccines and just stuff in our bodies that we're not hand-picking ourselves. And, you know, rightfully so because history has proven that it's not always the best idea to take stuff that people are giving us. Especially us minorities. How do you think we combat this stigma?

Brandon: That's a great question. And I don't think it has an easy answer. I think that it's gonna happen, one by one, right. Really talking and digging into what your concerns are. Because a lot of times, it's just not really understanding the medicine of what's going on, right. The science of it. And so I think that, again, having those conversations with somebody who maybe knows about those types of things. I think that could be something that could really... Wow. That's a tough question.

Jair: Yeah, it's hard. I think a big thing is just having tough conversations about these things, especially just with people who know stuff. I feel like it's one thing to talk about stuff like that with your homies. But I mean, it's not really gonna make much progress in the long term of things if it's somebody who doesn't really have information on that, you know, because everybody's got an opinion. I think it's super important that we seek out valid information and share that once we're like, alright, this is actual legit stuff here and not something that my aunt told me.

Brandon: Yeah. And you bring up a good point about all these different things that we see on the internet and stuff, right? A lot of it really is just false information. And so yeah, you really got to be careful about what you read or what you think is true. I think that's why it takes yeah, having multiple conversations and sort of figuring out really what's going on. I think that is going to be the way that we eventually destigmatize this thing.

Jair: Alright, last question. I know there's a lot of prominent health issues within black and brown communities specifically. And so, where do you see the future of medicine in regard to some of those issues? Do you see any of those problems becoming resolved? I know, diabetes is a pretty big one in our communities, as well as like high blood pressure just based on diets and stuff like that. And just, also not having access to healthier food selections. So where do you see the future of that heading?

Brandon: Yeah, that's a great question. I think you bring up a good point. You know, especially with things like diabetes and hypertension, things that can be optimally controlled by like, lifestyle, right? Things that don't necessarily require medical intervention, at least to begin with. And so I think, yeah, begins with education. So teaching people about what a heart healthy diet is and what that means. And even taking it a step further, it's one thing to teach, you know, what are the right things to eat, but then it's a whole nother thing to have access to those. Right. And so, I think at a community level, we've seen things where communities come together and put together farmers markets and fresh fruit exchange. Really facilitating that opportunity for others to be involved in healthy eating. I think a whole nother thing that is going to be essential, is sort of gaining that trust back into the medical

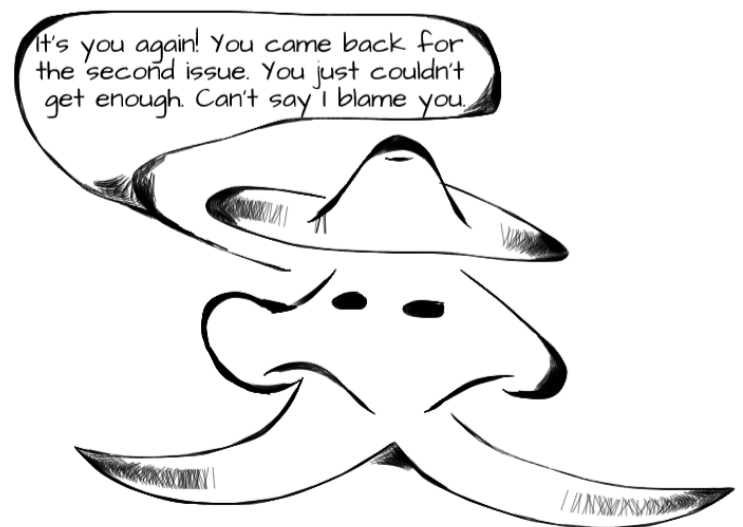
community. I'm sure you know have at least one family member who just doesn't go to the doctor just because they don't really think anything is wrong with them, or they think they'll be alright. Right. But I think that making health more of a normal conversation is going to be an important thing to consider, especially if we want to eliminate some of these disparities that we've seen over time. It's been consistent throughout our history. I think the only way to really get at the core of this issue is to allow everybody to access health care, and not just any health care, like quality health care. And then, you know, encouraging those who will now have access to actually engage with, issues of their home.

Jair: Yeah, absolutely. Seems like information and communication are the two big takeaways from all this. Just talking about things that are important and sometimes uncomfortable but could potentially save a life. Then also just having access to good information and just sharing that good information as well.

Brandon: No doubt.

Jair: Welp, that's all I've got. Thank you for the wisdom, sir. Stay black. Stay beautiful.

Brandon: Peace.



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