

# Global Health In *ACTION*

## IN THIS EDITION:



5th Leading Cause of  
Premature Death: Suicide



Macon Mothers: Lacking  
the Information They  
Need to Thrive



4 Steps for Researching  
Local Health Issues

▶ **PAGE 3**▶ **PAGE 5**▶ **PAGE 7**

# Going "GLOCAL"

## WELCOME BACK!

*THE GLOBAL HEALTH NEWSLETTER TEAM IS PROUD TO PRESENT A NEW VISION FOR THE NEWSLETTER: INVESTIGATIVE HEALTH JOURNALISM INVOLVING LOCAL HEALTH ISSUES.*

As writers for the Global Health Newsletter, it is an honor to represent the International and Global Studies Department (IGS). At first blush, the issues concerning global health, global development, and international affairs do not concern themselves with local issues nor issues palpable within the Macon, Georgia context. In the realm of global health in particular, local issues reverberate through the global like a ripple effect, as disease does not respect mere borders. Integral to the disciplines within IGS is a lens that views the world as increasingly interconnected, where local issues are not just important, but impossible to ignore.

The mission statement of the Global Health in Action Newsletter reads that our goal is to "shape

perspectives on health through a multidisciplinary approach...and to inspire personal growth and action in the Mercer and Macon communities". Now that the Newsletter has reached its fourth edition, the newsletter team wanted to flex our proverbial investigative health-journalism-muscle to fulfill the final part of the mission statement--inspiring action in the Macon community. Contributor and editor, Moriah Roycroft and myself had our own individual journeys in discovering more about health issues in Macon. Global health issues are all around us, perhaps especially in Macon, Georgia. Read on to find out why!

*-Mary Martinez, Editor-in-Chief*





## 5TH LEADING CAUSE OF PREMATURE DEATH: SUICIDE

Over the past 15 years, suicide rates in the United States have increased by 24 percent, afflicting 13 individuals per every 100,000 people. Macon, Georgia's suicide rate is more than double that at 25 individuals per 100,000 as of 2017.

Self-harm and suicide is the fifth leading cause of premature death in Bibb county. Black and white males aged 75-79 make up the largest majority of self-harm related deaths, while white males 55-59, and black males aged 20-24 respectively constitute the second and third most afflicted demographic.

Suicide rates in Macon are not far behind the murder rate, both being above the national average. The World Health Organization (WHO) characterizes suicide as a public health issue that burdens families, communities, and entire countries, and is one that has long-lasting effects. Indeed, suicide is not an issue that simply affects those lost, but those who remain with the illusive question: Why?

Mr. Howell, the chief mortician at Bentley & Sons Funeral home and graduate of Gupton-Jones Mortuary School, explained the "mental enslavement" that many people in Macon feel. "Their perception of the world, a world that is bound within poverty and hopelessness present in Macon, becomes reality," Howell explained, indicating that lack of opportunities that many suicide victims experience, becomes a blinder to potential.

"Sometimes, people feel their backs against the wall...naturally, when we feel cornered, it is instinctual to try and find a way out," Howell notes, regarding that suicide is almost a logical response to constant social disorder. However, even those whose

lives seem to be full of joy and prosperity are driven to suicide and suicidal ideation. Howell cited the recent suicide of Reverend Teddy Parker. As pastor of Bibb Mount Zion Baptist Church, Parker's vivacity and charisma seemed antithetical to his self-inflicted end, which stunned his congregation. Increasingly, "life is viewed as a competition" and with competition "comes the binary of winner and loser," Howell states.

Indeed, the shock of suicide is often linked to the "warning signs we fail to recognize," Howell

postulates, or even "take seriously". According to Dr. Olugbenga Obasanjo of the Bibb County Department of Health, certain environments create increased susceptibility to suicidal thoughts and acts. For example, older men often commit suicide after the passing of their spouse, or to end the suffering endured from a terminal illness, Obasanjo notes.

For younger victims of suicide, "hopelessness and extreme rates of poverty" seem to be the culprit of suicidal ideation and attempts according to the Bibb County school superintendent, Mr. David Gowan. However, Howell of Bentley & Sons Funeral Home believes the media specifically, is partly to blame. "Young people fill a void with the media...that stems from a lack of purpose," Howell states, arguing that young people are often sold media images as something to emulate, regardless of how harmful they may be.

The WHO reports that the "strongest risk factor for suicide is a previous suicide attempt," another warning factor that may go unnoticed.

*Continued on page 4.*

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**-Mr. Howell, Chief  
Mortician of Bentley &  
Sons Funeral Home**



## WHAT ARE SOME SOLUTIONS TO THE HIGH SUICIDE RATES IN MACON?

Although the rationale for committing suicide varies greatly from person to person, Howell offers a three-pronged solution to preventing suicide: (1) mentorship, (2) fatherhood, and (3) spirituality. His solution calls upon adults to mentor people, especially those without fathers or otherwise much familial support. “The norm of father absenteeism leaves children missing vital guidance,” where life is akin to playing cards and those without the support of fathers or father-figures are playing without a deck. Spirituality offers purpose that is not superficial, Howell proposes, and is devoid of the fleeting whims of the media.

David Gowan notes that resources are available for students, including school counselors. In addition, the Bibb County Health Department’s River Edge Behavioral Health Center offers a variety of mental health support, including a crisis line.

When Dr. Bruce Conn of Coliseum Medical Centers described suicide as “counter to being human,” as he did to Macon’s local news channel, WMAZ, a simple solution to suicide prevention is hidden within. Conn’s words rid



suicide victims of their humanity, distancing them even further from healing. Therein lies the simple solution—seeking to build camaraderie, not an atmosphere of competition, with others. “Life is a journey,” Howell noted at the close of the interview, not a mere game shaped by the binary of winning and losing. Indeed, life is journey, one that is made greater through a sense of commonality and altruism, not of one-upmanship and contention. ■



- ***Bibb County Health Department's River Edge Behavioral Health Center:*** 175 Emery Hwy, Macon, GA 31217; (478) 803-7600.
- ***River Edge Crisis Service Center 24-hour Crisis Hotline:*** (478) 451-2797.
- ***National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:*** 1-800-273-8255





# MACON MOTHERS: LACKING THE INFORMATION THEY NEED TO THRIVE



## HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS WEIGH IN ON THE DIFFICULTIES OF PROVIDING CARE TO LOCAL MOTHERS AND HOW WE AS A COMMUNITY CAN HELP

# 16%

16% of women in Central Georgia receive **no** prenatal care whatsoever during their first trimester of pregnancy. Action during this time frame is crucial for preventing future complications and establishing a healthy plan for expectant mothers in regards to proper nutrition, exercise, immunization, and mental health.

Mothers who do not receive prenatal care are three times more likely to give birth to a low-weight baby, and their baby is five times more likely to die. Sadly, approximately 25% of all women in the U.S. do not receive the recommended number of prenatal visits; this number rises to 32% among African Americans and Hispanics.

### **Why are we struggling to take care of our mothers?**

The United States spends more money per capita on hospital-based maternal care than anywhere else in the world. In comparison with nations that spend similar percentages of their GDP, we also have the most maternal death. Why does this troubling reality exist?

Dr. Patrice Walker, a beloved OB/GYN and educator in Macon, who matriculated through Mercer's School of Medicine, speaks to the fundamental roots of the issue.

"Macon simply has not structured itself as a society around providing quality maternal care. There are so many complexities and social determinants of health that surround this crisis. However, there is hope. I believe that some of our newer models at Navicent will help women to be more informed about the process of pregnancy."

Some of these programs include Centering Pregnancy, a national initiative that brings together groups of women from all racial and socioeconomic backgrounds to receive prenatal health care together outside of the confines of a normal exam room. In Macon, Centering was begun by a group of residents at Navicent in an effort to address the hands-off attitude of many women in Macon in regards to their health care.

Dr. Walker has found that a lack of involvement in the decision-making process of pregnancy is not specific to any one classification of people.

"Both the community members under the poverty line and those above it seem to face similar problems. They somehow both think that the process will be easier if they just allow someone else to make all of their decisions for them - whether its just ignoring the pregnancy all together or throwing money at the problem."

There is a group of women in Macon who have decided to seek health care outside of Macon's allopathic medical system. Midwives, doulas, and other providers are crucial for women who chose such a path.

*Continued on page 6.*



# MACON MOTHERS: LACKING THE INFORMATION THEY NEED TO THRIVE



Mrs. Kenneth, a locally-based doula, in essence a birthing coach, addresses her concerns with the lack of information for mothers in Macon,

"As much as I believe that it is important that a woman have a birth plan and choose as many natural methods of birthing as possible, it is also important that we as outside providers work alongside physicians in the area to promote healthy babies and mothers. Neither one of us should do it alone. We need to work together to make sure mothers are aware of how their choices effect them and baby."

Communication between midwives and physicians has improved over the last several years. But despite the amicable nature of many of these relations, there is an inherent disconnect with the appropriate steps to take during times like labor. Thus, the mother needs to have clear understanding of what she wants. Of course, she needs to know what her options are first.

There are far too many women in Macon who are not receiving adequate information on the importance of caring for themselves during the early stages of pregnancy. Mrs. Kenneth estimates that around **half of the women she cares for had not previously done any research on prenatal care.** It's time for this to change.

In the age of technology, it seems unfathomable that women do not have access to the information they need. Mrs. Kenneth candidly addressed the prevalence of domestic violence and abusive relationships in Macon and how that could prevent a woman from receiving the care she desperately needs

Can we avoid the future heartbreak associated with unnecessary deaths of our mothers and children ?  
Our cost to death ratio is severely off.

## How can we help?

The greatest role the community plays in aiding a new mother is in public health activism. By supporting the whole woman through the process and encouraging her to explore options outside of what she already knows.

Be on the watch for signs of an abusive relationship. If it appears that the relationship is endangering the mother or prohibiting her from receiving adequate care, carefully approach the situation.

Lastly, we can be innovative in solutions that would make access to and information about prenatal care more accessible and discrete for all mothers. ■

## TIPS FOR EXPECTANT MOTHERS

If you don't like your caregiver, move on! Do not settle.

Reach out to women around you for more information. Religious or community organizations are a great place to start!

Never be afraid to ask your providers questions. With adequate prenatal care, many issues are preventable.

Moriah Roycroft



# 4 STEPS FOR RESEARCHING LOCAL HEALTH ISSUES

1. Use the Online Analytical Statistical Information System (OASIS) to look up any number of local health statistics that interest you and conduct preliminary research. <https://oasis.state.ga.us/>
2. Brainstorm possible points of contact. For example, if you are interested in obesity rates in Macon, consider talking to the Parks & Recreation Office about their rationale for the importance of public places for exercise. Remember to think outside the box!
3. Draft some concise questions about your concerns and take action. Sometimes scheduling an appointment with local points of contact is not necessary, and physically arriving at a local office is your best way to get your questions answered.
4. Each month, the Bibb County Board of Health meets at the Bibb County Health Department. These meetings are open to the public. Feel free to attend to express your concerns and listen to what board official are discussing. Health Department: [171 Emery Hwy](#); Schedule of events: <http://northcentralhealthdistrict.org/events/>

Mary Martinez

## An anecdote about the research journey...



During my research on the maternal health piece, I began seeking out health care leaders in the Macon. After a few unsuccessful attempts to reach out to physicians, I was incredibly blessed to have support from Dr. Patrice Walker. She not only has taught me much about maternal health care in Macon, but has instilled within me an interest in perhaps pursuing this type of work further as part of my career aspirations. After our initial interview for the piece, we have been able to meet several times for coffee.

Dr. Walker has suggested opportunities that I am positive I would never have heard of otherwise. Because she is outside of my typical "bubble" of undergraduate life, the probability that I would have bumped into her otherwise are extremely slim.

You never know what types of life-altering relationships you may form when conducting this type of research!

Moriah Roycroft

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