Your Health

Walk the Talk

By GLENN TOWNES
Special to the AmNews

As the highest-ranking African-American senior executive at technology industry giant Orasure Technologies, Debra Fraser-Howze is used to being at the vanguard of change. In her role as senior vice president of government and external affairs for the Bethlehem, Pa., scientific research company, Fraser-Howze, among other things, works with legislators to ensure that often under-served communities are provided with the necessary resources to detect and treat certain medical conditions, particularly HIV/AIDS.

Fraser-Howze joined the company in 2008 after spending nearly 20 years as the head of the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS (NBLCA). In a recent interview with the AmNews, Fraser-Howze said the perceived stigma of HIV/AIDS continues to dissuade many people from knowing their status and taking an HIV test. “The virus hits our community the hardest, yet we are the most likely not to be tested,” she said. “People are afraid to know if they have the virus and won’t go to a physician or clinic to even be tested.”

Images of terminally ill infants remain fresh in Fraser-Howze’s mind. “I remember standing in the pediatrics ward at Harlem Hospital and holding babies that were infected with the virus,” she said. “I remember hearing stories from people who were living with the virus and didn’t know if they would live.” These sobering images and melancholic stories motivated Fraser-Howze to assist in the development and marketing of the first-ever rapid, at-home HIV/AIDS test.

According to the most recent statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, 1 in 16 African-American men and 1 in 32 African-American women will be diagnosed with HIV/AIDS at some point in their lifetime. About 40 percent of all new HIV infections are among African-Americans, with Latinos also disproportionately infected with the virus. About 1.1 million Americans are living with the virus.

Finally, as someone who has stood at the helm of several organizations created to fight HIV/AIDS, Fraser-Howze said the landscape of the HIV/AIDS epidemic has indeed changed in the past 30 years. “We are doing well [in the fight against HIV/AIDS],” she said. “But we could be doing better.”

To find out more about the at-home HIV/AIDS test, visit www.oraquick.com.

Woman at the forefront in fight against HIV/AIDS

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