

Strong Men Put Their Heart Health First

By Clarence Ancar,
heart surgery survivor

(NAPSA)—In the blink of an eye, my life went from living what I believed to be a “normal” lifestyle to almost becoming one of the over 37,000 African American men who die of heart disease each year. One moment I was enjoying a family vacation in Mississippi, and just two days later, I was in the hospital due to shortness of breath and dizziness. A series of tests showed that I had three blocked arteries, and I would quickly need triple coronary bypass surgery to save my life.



Mr. Ancar with cardiologist Dr. Ferdinand.

When I was told I needed surgery in March of 1999, I couldn't believe it. I felt angry, confused, and wondered, “How could I have allowed this to happen to me?” I knew I had a family history of heart disease. My grandfather and father both died from heart attacks before the age of 60. I knew my blood pressure and cholesterol levels were off the charts, but I ignored my doctor's advice on living a healthier lifestyle. I knew I should exercise more, eat better and take my medications regularly to help lower my blood pressure and cholesterol. But like many men, it was always something I would do tomorrow. Because I delayed, I was almost too late in saving my own life.

After my surgery I decided to put my heart health first. I was given a second chance and I owed

it to myself and my loved ones to live a long, healthy life. Dr. Keith C. Ferdinand and my health care team taught me that heart disease was not a death sentence and that I could still live a productive life if I committed to making a change and respected my heart condition. My wife, family, friends and doctor were all counting on me, and I wasn't going to let this defeat me.

“One of the best ways African American men can achieve good heart health and longevity is to have a primary care provider who knows the patient's history and provides preventive care, screenings and referrals to specialists when needed. I value my strong relationship with Clarence and how we have worked together to improve his heart health.”

—Keith C. Ferdinand, M.D.

I developed a plan with my doctor and health care team to improve my heart health. Committing to this new lifestyle wasn't easy at first. I felt like I was on my own and I didn't know where to begin. My health care team helped me see that by setting small, achievable goals, and tracking those goals, I could make a big and lasting difference in my health. I learned the importance of high blood pressure and cholesterol medications and started taking them regularly, as prescribed. With my dietitian's help, I started eating less of the fatty, salty and greasy food that the South is known for and more fruits and vegetables. I also walked two to three miles each day. After my surgery, I lost a significant amount of weight.

One of the best things I do for my health is visit my doctor regularly to ensure my heart is functioning at its best. At each visit, we track my blood pressure and cholesterol numbers to make sure they are controlled. I have a

strong, trusting relationship with Dr. Ferdinand, and he motivates and supports me in staying heart healthy.

Many African American men feel too “macho” for regular doctor visits, especially if they aren't sick. Take it from me, health care professionals know how your heart should perform, and they can work with you to reduce your risks for heart disease and stroke. Strong men put their heart health first, so don't be afraid to ask questions and trust their advice.

For American Heart Month, learn from my story and don't let heart disease take you by surprise. One day of delay and it could be too late. I challenge you to be strong and commit to making one heart-healthy lifestyle change during the month of February. Share your success with others on Million Hearts® Facebook page at www.facebook.com/millionhearts. Learn simple steps you can take for better heart health at millionhearts.hhs.gov. Your family, friends and community are counting on you to be strong and take care of your heart.

Did You Know?

- African American men, especially those who live in the Southeast, are at the highest risk for heart disease.

- More than 40 percent of African Americans have high blood pressure, the leading cause of heart disease and stroke.

- Heart disease and stroke can be prevented. Simple changes such as taking medication as prescribed, eating healthy, getting regular exercise and quitting smoking can make a big difference in improving your heart health.

- Visit millionhearts.hhs.gov to learn how to get—and stay—heart healthy. Share your heart health successes on Facebook at www.facebook.com/millionhearts.