

## That Black Men Might Live: My Fight against Prostate Cancer

Reverend Charles R. Williams and Vernon A. Williams;  
Roscoe, IL: Hilton Publishing Co., 2003

Eliminating health disparities is a key aim among our nation's health objectives for 2010. *That Black Men Might Live: My Fight against Prostate Cancer* answers this call in a most illuminating way through the personal story of Rev. Williams and his experience with prostate cancer. Rev. Williams, who died recently, made important contributions to the African-American community nationally and locally through his work with Indiana Black Expo and other organizations and initiatives. In the 10 chapters of *That Black Men Might Live: My Fight against Prostate Cancer*, Rev. Williams reflects on his first awareness of symptoms of illness, his reluctance to seek medical evaluation, his interactions with healthcare professionals, the diagnosis of metastatic prostate cancer and living with advanced disease. A chapter provides the perspective of women and partners through annotated narratives written by his significant other and a close business associate. The text considers treatments for advanced disease, such as orchiectomy and hormone therapy; discusses their side effects and the impact on broader physical, psychological and social function; and considers alternative and complimentary therapies.

Early in my career as a clinical psychologist working with persons diagnosed with cancer, one of my patients made the ironic observa-

tion that he, as a black man, had survived urban violence and poverty only to suffer cancer as an adult. Similarly, Rev. Williams describes his struggle to succeed in his work and to make contributions to his community, only to come to understand that chronic overwork and neglect of health contributed to delay in seeking evaluation and treatment of prostate cancer. Thus, a central theme of the text is the disproportionate impact of prostate cancer on the lives of black men. Through his own example, Rev. Williams considers how cultural and social resources and stresses influence a person's ability to recognize a serious health problem and to seek medical care. The disarming narrative also allows the reader to gain a deeper understanding of how patients and their healthcare professionals can conspire to provide less than optimal—and at times, poor—quality of care, when caregivers accept a patient's self-diagnoses with little question.

Throughout the book, Rev. Williams places his experience within the context of deep faith and spiritual beliefs. From this perspective, *That Black Men Might Live: My Fight against Prostate Cancer* is a story of adaptation and transformation. Rev. Williams was devastated to learn that the pain he attributed to arthritis was bone pain from metastatic prostate cancer and to recognize the tenuousness of his longevity. He was further dismayed to fully realize how the disease and treatment would severely change his sexual feelings and abilities. In spite of the crisis, his spiritual connections and close social relationships provided the meaning and sustenance for him to grow personally. These descriptions provide a rare and intimate

glimpse into the workings of a resilient person.

I strongly urge healthcare professionals to read *That Black Men Might Live: My Fight against Prostate Cancer* with an eye toward understanding how we might best identify the pathways of health disparities in cancer outcomes and to consider how we might best eliminate them. Healthcare professionals may be interested in whether they should recommend *That Black Men Might Live: My Fight against Prostate Cancer* to their patients. Because the book focuses on advanced prostate cancer, the information may not be highly relevant to men newly diagnosed with localized disease. However, the text may provide a motivating force for prostate cancer screening among high-risk men, and many persons will be inspired by Rev. Williams' example. While the book offers insight about the unique experiences of black men, it provides a powerful example of personal integrity and resilience in a person with cancer and will likely appeal to diverse groups, regardless of ethnic background.

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