

Experts Issue a Call-to-Action to Recognize Periods as a Vital Sign of Health to Reduce Disparities in Uterine Fibroid Care for Black Women

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Black Women's Health Imperative and Hologic hosted Unmuting Fibroids: Getting Loud for Equal Care A roundtable to Address Disparities in Uterine Fibroid Care

ATLANTA, GA (Oct. 19, 2021) – A multidisciplinary group of experts agree that elevating awareness of a woman's period as a vital sign of health would help to routinize and prioritize care for the uterine fibroids that impact eighty percent of Black women¹. This approach was one of several key initiatives proposed to reduce disparities in uterine fibroid care during Unmuting Fibroids: Getting Loud for Equal Care, a roundtable convened by The Black Women's Health Imperative (BWHI) in partnership with Hologic's **Project Health Equality**. Participants also cited the need to connect Black patients to culturally competent care and to get behind bipartisan legislation introduced to support greater funding for research, education, and access to care.

Uterine fibroids, which are benign uterine tumors, impact approximately 26 million women in the U.S. with a disproportionate impact on Black women². Symptoms of uterine fibroids can include severe menstrual bleeding, anemia, fatigue, pain, bladder or bowel dysfunction, impaired fertility, and pregnancy complications and loss. These symptoms can have negative effects on workplace productivity and overall quality of life. Even in their 30's, 74 percent of Black women will have multiple fibroids versus 31 percent of white women³, and Black women are more than twice as likely to undergo a hysterectomy and have almost a seven-fold increased risk of undergoing myomectomies despite studies that show increased morbidity with both myomectomy and hysterectomy⁴.

"A nearly 80 percent incidence of any medical condition should be a major public health priority," said Linda Blount, President and CEO, Black Women's Health Imperative. "Unfortunately, despite the prevalence and severity of uterine fibroids experienced by Black women, there remain deep disparities in how we receive care."

Black women suffer greater severity of disease as evidenced by being twice as likely to be hospitalized for fibroid-related issues as white women⁵. While Black women are diagnosed with fibroids at younger ages, they will often wait four years or more before seeking treatment for fibroids⁴, in part due to being offered more invasive treatments vs. minimally invasive solutions.

"For too long, Black women have suffered with fibroids, often in silence, and when you listen to their stories about their fear, pain and their experience of not being heard by health providers, it's heartbreaking," said Rachel Villanueva, MD FACOG, the National Medical Association. "Knowledge is power. We need to empower women to understand their menstrual health as a sign of their overall health and well-being."

Critical actions identified by the roundtable participants include:

- Designating periods as a vital health sign
 - The medical community must highlight what a healthy menstrual cycle is and why it is important to discuss a patient's period to identify if it might be signaling other health conditions such as uterine fibroids.
- Educating healthcare providers about uterine fibroids and the Black woman's experience to better connect women to culturally competent care
 - Panelists agreed that better education on uterine fibroids and specifically how they manifest in Black women needs to be prioritized in medical school and made a part of continuing medical education.
- Supporting legislation to enable funding for research, education and awareness to providers and patients
 - Passing legislation around uterine fibroids was discussed as one of the priority actions stemming from this discussion. The Stephanie Tubbs Jones Uterine Fibroid Research and Education Act of 2021 (S. 2444 / H.R. 2007), which was introduced to both the House and Senate earlier this year, is the only piece of legislation that would provide greater visibility and financial support for uterine fibroid research and awareness.

"Despite their prevalence and severe health and quality of life implications, uterine fibroids are in the bottom 50 conditions funded by the NIH," said Essex Mitchell, Division President, Hologic. "That is why, as part of our Project Health Equality, Hologic is proud to partner with BWHI and all the experts who participated in Unmuting Fibroids in charting a new course for awareness, research, and access to care."

Unmuting Fibroids: Getting Loud for Equal Care was moderated by Tiffany Cross, host of MSNBC's The Cross Connection, who shared her own personal experience with uterine fibroids. A complete list of participants is included below.

For more information on Unmuting Fibroids: Getting Loud for Equal Care please visit **UNmuting Fibroids**.

About The Black Women's Health Imperative

The Black Women's Health Imperative (BWHI) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing health equity and social justice for Black women across the lifespan through policy, advocacy, education, research, and leadership development. The organization identifies the most pressing health issues that affect the nation's 22 million Black women and girls and invests in the best strategies and organizations that accomplish its goals. For more information, please visit bwhi.org.

About Hologic's Project Health Equality

Project Health Equality (PHE) is a multifaceted, multiyear initiative from Hologic, Inc. that uniquely combines research, education, and access to address the structural and cultural barriers that prevent Black and Hispanic women from receiving the same quality of healthcare as white women. The initiative seeks immediate change in how healthcare is experienced by thousands of Black and Hispanic women in cities across the United States and involves crucial partners such as BWHI and RAD-AID to drive meaningful, sustainable change for these communities.

For more information regarding PHE, visit <https://www.hologic.com/ProjectHealthEquality>

For more information on solutions for uterine fibroids, visit <https://gynsurgicalsolutions.com/patients/for-patients/>

Full Panelist List:

- Christopher Cox, Chief of Staff, Office of Congresswoman Yvette Clarke (D-NY)
- Cindy Duke, MD, PhD FACOG, Medical Director, Nevada Fertility Institute
- Cynthia Bailey, American Model, Reality Television personality, and Actress
- Donald Cravins., Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, National Urban League
- Kim Miller-Tolbert, Deputy Legislative Director & Policy Advisor, Office of US Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ)

- Kimberly Wilson, Founder and CEO, HUED
- Lauren Powell, MD, Board-Certified Family Medicine Physician, “The Culinary Doctor”
- Mervyn Jones, son of late Stephanie Tubbs Jones, Principal, MLJ Strategies
- Nischelle Turner, Co-Host, Entertainment Tonight
- Rachel Villanueva, MD, FACOG, Clinical Assistant Professor of Obstetrics/Gynecology, NYU Grossman School of Medicine
- Shawna Watley, Co-founder, Women Investing in Leadership Development (WiiLD), Lobbyist for Holland & Knight, and First Lady of Kingdom Fellowship AME Church in Silver Spring, MD
- Sophie Maeter, Legislative Aide, Office of US Senator Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV)
- Soyini Hawkins, MD, Gynecologic Surgeon, Fibroid and Pelvic Wellness Center of Georgia
- Tamar Braxton, Grammy Nominated Singer, Emmy Nominated TV Host and Executive Producer
- Wanda Durant, Founder, The Wanda Durant Real MVP Foundation
- Yvonne Orji, Actress, Comedian, and Author

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