

Oncologist works to fill health education gaps

'I just made certain choices while others didn't'

By **Chelsea Keenan**, The Gazette

Dr. Vincent Reid thinks cancer care needs to be about more than just chemotherapy and radiation treatment.

Since coming to Mercy Medical Center in 2012, the surgical oncologist and medical director of Mercy Medical Center's Hall Perrine Cancer Center has helped the center receive an outstanding in its Commission on Cancer accreditation in 2014, add multidisciplinary clinics for breast, skin, lung and thyroid, and undergo a major upgrade of the center's radiation equipment.

But Reid takes the most pride in his work to increase health care access through free cancer screenings and to decrease health disparities, especially among Cedar Rapids' black population.

"Often there are large gaps in care and knowledge," he said. "Certain kinds of cancer affect the African-American population disproportionately."

For example, while the risk of getting breast cancer is lower for black women than for white women, the risk of



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"Often there are large gaps in care and knowledge. Certain kinds of cancer affect the African-American population disproportionately," says Vincent Reid, surgical oncologist at Mercy Medical Center.

dying from breast cancer is higher, according to the Susan G. Komen Foundation. In 2011, black women had a 44 percent higher rate of breast cancer mortality than white women.

Reid said this is because black women are less likely to get regular mammograms, so once the cancer is found, it's

more advanced.

Reid has helped put together educational events and free cancer screenings that target Cedar Rapids' black population to help fill in those gaps. He also gives presentations and speaks at forums.

Participating in these community events gives black

residents a chance to see medical professionals who look like them, which can help them feel more comfortable, Reid said.

"People can be scared to ask questions," he said.

Reid was born and raised in a poor, rural part of Jamaica where education was not a

huge priority and few children were able to advance to high school, he recalled. But he studied hard — sometimes by kerosene lamp — for the entrance exam and passed.

He attributed much of his success to his grandmother, who helped raise him. His mother was only 13 when she had him, and his father was absent.

"There's nothing special about me," he said. "I just made certain choices while others didn't."

He went to college in the United States, attending the University of Cincinnati's medical school and doing his surgical residency in Brooklyn, N.Y.

He met his wife, Darline, when both were undergraduates at City College of New York.

After practicing in New York for several years, he moved to Iowa — a place that allows him to be the kind of surgeon and father he wants to be, he said, where he can spend more time with his children rather than in traffic or at work.

"I was raised without a father," he said. "So I'm sensitive to my kids' needs."

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