

# Health and Wellness

Feature Article

## DISCUSSING HEALTH: ADVOCATING FOR SELF

At the 2015 Indiana Commission on the Social Status of Black Males (ICSSBM) state conference in October, it was reported that Black Males continue to have the lowest life expectancy rates in the U.S. The high mortality rates among black males ages 20—34 has mobilized parents, community advocates, political and religious leaders working together to identify solutions to address the problems to improve the life chances.

However, the recent deaths of higher profile entertainers like Malik “Phife Dawg” Taylor from the hip-hop group “A Tribe Called Quest” at age 45, music legend Prince at age 57, and others, more recently has served as a reminder that high mortality rates remain a stark reality for black males 35 years of age and older.

Recently, the CSBM sat down to with Rory G. James, Director of Student Diversity and Inclusion at the IU School of Public Health, to discuss health and get his perspective on issues of health and wellness as it relates to Black Males.

“The question facing black males of when I was growing up was whether they would live to see 21. Now black men are dying in their 40's.” If black men don’t advocate for themselves who else is going to do it.”

Within the black community and among males in particular there continues to be a reluctance to get

“Whether straight, gay, married or single, it is time to discuss our issues openly and honestly and talk about what’s going on in our lives. It is important that we create spaces for these discussions to happen.”

Rory James

treatment and go the doctor, and it is long overdue for this trend to be broken. The focus on wellness should also include attention to mental health. There continues to be stigma around mental health issues. You don't have to have a mental disorder to go see a therapist; and although there's nothing wrong with talking to religious leader, we should also considering seeking out a therapist,” comments James.

An often overlooked aspect of health among black men, is attention to oral health. Many people have not made the connection that the plaque build-up in your teeth, is the same as the build-up in your arteries. I cannot overemphasize the importance of getting your gums cleaning. Although we harp on diet, stress exercise, attention to oral health is paramount. “Whether straight, gay, married or single, it is time to discuss our issues openly and honestly and talk about what's going on in our lives,” says James. “It is important that we have to create spaces for these discussions to happen.”



**Rory G. James**

*Director of Student Diversity and Inclusion-IU School of Public Health*

### Feature Profile

▶ From Chicago, Illinois

▶ Joined a peer advocacy group in high school that educated students about HIV and AIDS

▶ Interested in Biology in high school but wanted to become a “Disease Detective” rather than a medical doctor

▶ Volunteered with the Department of Health in Chicago

▶ Worked on a project with the Center for Disease Control (CDC)

▶ Holds a Masters degree in Public Health from Tulane University