



THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Kicking Kidney Disease

VA nephrologist Dr. Bessie Young shines a light on awareness and prevention for a disease affecting growing populations

BY SHEILA MICKOOL

Nephrologist Dr. Bessie Young is on a mission: to eliminate kidney disease. "This disease can run in families and crosses all boundaries; one in seven American adults has [it]," she says. "In the African-American community, the number with end-stage kidney disease or who need to go on dialysis increases fourfold." As a physician at Veterans Affairs Puget Sound Health Care, Seattle

Division, a researcher for both the Kidney Research Institute and the Seattle Epidemiologic Research and Information Center, a core investigator for the VA Health Services Research and Development Center, and an associate professor of medicine in the division of nephrology at the University of Washington, Young works every day to better understand, treat and

fight the disease, including founding the Kidney Health Fest for African American Families. She and her husband, Marco Mielcarek, live on Phinney Ridge.

How did you come to be so passionate about kidney disease?

I wanted to focus on a disease that was dominant in people of color. New research also suggests that some populations, especially black populations, may be genetically predisposed to kidney disease. But the disease is actually preventable. Good nutrition, moderate exercise and a reduction of salt in the diet minimize the risk [as does] controlling diabetes and high blood pressure. Three simple medical tests help doctors detect the disease: checking blood pressure, a urine test and a blood test—if people only knew.

Lately, what has inspired you the most? The movie *Lincoln* really moved me. It's powerful; every American should see this movie. I was so inspired that I went out and bought Doris Kearn Goodwin's book about Lincoln

afterwards [*Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*].

What is your favorite guilty pleasure? I love Ben & Jerry's Chunky Monkey ice cream, but limit myself to indulging once a month. Usually I eat the same healthy foods I recommend to my patients and stick to a low-salt diet.

Someday you'd like to...? Travel to Egypt to explore the pyramids. I have a deep-seated fascination with the history of the pharaohs and want to learn more. The King Tut exhibit [recently in Seattle] made me even more determined.

What would people be surprised to learn about you? That I've started doing yoga! My sister is an instructor, so I tried it. It's great exercise and keeps you flexible. It really changes the way you look at the world; it keeps you centered and focused. Setting intentions as part of the practice helps me get things done and strengthens my resolve. I highly recommend it. +

DR. BESSIE YOUNG
IS LEADING THE
CHARGE TO
EDUCATE PEOPLE
ABOUT KIDNEY
DISEASE
PREVENTION

