

**Heart Disease Research Takes on Personal Meaning For
Leading African American Physician
*Volunteers Needed for Largest Ever Chelation Study***

Lisa Merritt, M.D., is no stranger to the devastating consequences of heart disease. Her husband died suddenly of a heart attack at age 40, leaving her to raise their young daughter alone, and her elderly father is now recuperating from a heart attack.

Being a sought-after physician, Dr. Merritt felt empowered to do something to help others with heart disease. When the National Institutes of Health asked for medical researchers to conduct a study to explore whether chelation therapy (pronounced key-LAY-shun) could help prevent future heart attacks in patients who had already suffered an attack, Dr. Merritt signed on immediately.

“We must keep looking for ways to battle heart disease,” said Dr. Merritt. “It is only through conducting evidence-based research that we are going to discover what therapies work and what therapies don’t work.”

Many people with heart disease are already considering chelation therapy despite a lack of clear evidence that it works. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 60,000 people per year use chelation therapy as an alternative treatment.

The goal of the study is to test whether chelation therapy and/or high-dose vitamin therapy is effective for the treatment of heart disease. Chelation therapy is a process in which a synthetic or man-made amino acid called EDTA is delivered intravenously. EDTA binds with molecules, such as metals or minerals, and holds them tightly so that they can be removed from the body.

The chelation therapy study, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health, is the largest study of its kind. More than 100 medical institutions across the country, including the Riverside Family Medical Center where Dr. Merritt is based in Atlanta, Georgia, were selected to take part in the study.

Study researchers are now recruiting patients. They are looking for men and women age 50 and older who have had a heart attack. Those who participate will join a nationwide effort to learn whether chelation therapy works, helping the medical community find new and effective treatments for heart disease.

Dr. Merritt especially encourages African Americans to participate in the study. “Heart disease is the leading cause of death for all Americans, including African Americans,” she said. “We must work together as a community so that we don’t leave any stone unturned as we search for answers to prevent and treat this dangerous disease.”

She also stresses the importance of recruiting women to the study. “Women need to be well represented in this study,” Dr. Merritt said. “Heart disease often presents differently in women than in men and if this therapy impacts women differently, we want to know that.” Heart disease is also the leading cause of death in women.

[African American News Article]

There is no cost to participate in the study and participants will be closely monitored to ensure they receive the optimal standard of care for their heart disease, such as vitamin supplements and advice on lifestyle and diet. Participants will be randomly assigned to receive: either chelation therapy or placebo (saline) solution and either high-dose vitamin therapy or placebo pills. All participants will also receive low-dose vitamins.

More information about the study is available at the NIH National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine's Web site at www.nccam.nih.gov/chelation or by calling 1-888-644-6226.

"I have a professional and personal commitment to do everything I can do to address heart disease," said Dr. Merritt. "This study represents an opportunity to gain important answers about an alternative treatment for heart disease, and I want all of the answers I can find."

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This article is provided by the Mount Sinai Medical Center in Miami Beach, Florida. As Florida's largest private not-for-profit teaching hospital, Mount Sinai Medical Center is a distinguished leader in education and research. For more information, please contact 305-674-2162.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Photos of Dr. Lisa Merritt and study participants are available upon request. Please contact Rebecca Leaf at 202-745-5100.