

Columbia University Opens Community Wellness Center for West Harlem on New Manhattanville Campus

Olajide Williams, M.D., and Sidney Hankerson, M.D., lead expanded community mental health and stroke awareness programs in the Jerome L. Greene Science Center



Dr. Sidney Hankerson



Dr. Olajide Williams

New York, October 11, 2016—Columbia University President Lee C. Bollinger has appointed two Columbia University Medical Center doctors to lead the new community Wellness Center, located in the Jerome L. Greene Science Center on the University's new Manhattanville campus. Neurologist Olajide Williams, M.D., and psychiatrist Sidney Hankerson, M.D., are known for their pioneering approaches to improving public health in Harlem and Washington Heights. The Wellness Center operates with support from Columbia's Mortimer B. Zuckerman Mind Brain Behavior Institute.

"When we committed ourselves to creating a new kind of open, accessible campus in Manhattanville, we knew it would be essential for Columbia to use this as an opportunity to deepen our partnerships with the local community," said Columbia President Lee C. Bollinger. "Dr. Williams and Dr. Hankerson are rightly admired for the innovative work they have done to engage individuals, families and organizations in improving health and wellness in Harlem and Washington Heights."

The Wellness Center houses the Community Health Worker Stroke Prevention program, designed to raise awareness about one of the leading causes of death and disability in the United

States. The free program includes six-week training sessions, to be held throughout the year that will give local residents the tools they need to become community health workers. Volunteers will learn about cardiovascular health issues, with a special emphasis on stroke and related risk factors. The program, modeled on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's training curriculum for community health workers, is led by Dr. Williams, chief of staff of neurology and associate professor of neurology at Columbia University Medical Center, founder of Hip Hop Public Health; and co-director of the Center for Stroke Disparities Solutions in New York.

"I live in Harlem, I raised my children in Harlem, I have worked in Harlem my whole career as a neurologist, and I recognized the painful disparities that plague communities of color," said Dr. Williams. "I don't think that we, as physicians, will be able to realize the type of outcomes that our local communities desperately need if we do not venture out of the four walls of our hospitals. By extending our work through this new Wellness Center, we're fulfilling our fundamental responsibility as physicians and healers to our immediate community."

The Wellness Center is also home base for Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), a program dedicated to improving access to quality mental health services in Upper Manhattan. To address the hurdles faced by African Americans and Latinos when it comes to getting mental health treatment, the program works with local faith communities, training leaders to identify and respond to signs of depression and other mental illnesses, as well as substance-use disorders like alcoholism and drug addiction. Dr. Hankerson, assistant professor of clinical psychiatry at Columbia University College of Physicians & Surgeons and the New York State Psychiatric Institute, founded the program. His team will teach members of the community to combat the stigma often associated with mental health issues and help others seek medical care. Mental Health First Aid also will provide mental health resources onsite at the Wellness Center.

“The Wellness Center is going to be a hub for health in West Harlem,” said Dr. Hankerson. “We know that people of color, African Americans and Latinos, are disproportionately affected by chronic medical conditions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, depression, anxiety and stroke. Our goal is to promote education, awareness and engagement so people can get the help and healing that they need.”

In addition to the stroke and mental health awareness programs, the Wellness Center also provides free blood pressure readings and cholesterol tests on weekdays and select weekends to all who walk in. Visitors are given records of their results, as well as information on ways they can improve their health. Wellness Center staff offers information about free and low-cost clinical resources in the neighborhood and within the NewYork-Presbyterian/Columbia University Medical Center community. Printed materials and other resources are available in English and Spanish. Services at the Wellness Center will be provided by ColumbiaDoctors.

The ground floor of the Jerome L. Greene Science Center, open to the public, is also a neighborhood-based resource for brain science education. A new “Education Lab” supports free public programs that harness the groundbreaking research of Columbia’s Zuckerman Mind Brain Behavior Institute in creative and exciting ways for school children, science teachers, families, after-school groups and seniors.

The street-level Education Lab, which is designed to resemble Columbia’s Zuckerman Institute’s research laboratories, offers a variety of hands-on brain science programs year-round. These programs include a Public Lecture Series and Teacher-Scholar Program that introduces middle and high school science teachers in New York City to cutting-edge brain science; Brain Research Apprenticeships in New York at Columbia (BRAINYAC), a program that provides an immersive science research experience in which high school students—primarily from upper Manhattan and the Bronx—train and work in Columbia neuroscience laboratories; and Community Brain Expo featuring scientific activities for all ages. These exciting programs are intended to provide the next generation of scientists and people of all ages with an understanding of brain science and how it applies to their everyday lives.

“This is going to be an amazing opportunity for collaborations, for the development of new partnerships between scientists, between physicians, between psychologists, and most importantly members of the West Harlem community, to really identify how we can provide the best care delivered in a culturally sensitive way, and how we can positively impact the lives of people in West Harlem,” said Hankerson.

Columbia University’s Mortimer B. Zuckerman Mind Brain Behavior Institute brings together an extraordinary group of world-class scientists and scholars to pursue the most urgent and exciting challenge of our time: understanding the brain and mind. A deeper understanding of the brain promises to transform human health and society. From effective treatments for disorders like Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, depression and autism to advances in fields as fundamental as computer science, economics, law, the arts and social policy, the potential for humanity is staggering. **To learn more, visit zuckermaninstitute.columbia.edu.**

Columbia University Medical Center provides international leadership in basic, preclinical and clinical research; medical and health sciences education; and patient care. The medical center trains future leaders and includes the dedicated work of many physicians, scientists, public health professionals, dentists and nurses at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Mailman School of Public Health, the College of Dental Medicine, the School of Nursing, the biomedical departments of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and allied research centers and institutions. Columbia University Medical Center is home to the largest medical research enterprise in New York City and State and one of the largest faculty medical practices in the Northeast. The campus that Columbia University Medical Center shares with its hospital partner, NewYork-Presbyterian, is now called the Columbia University Irving Medical Center. **For more information, visit cumc.columbia.edu or columbiadoctors.org.**

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