Summary of Health and Wellness in Focus Program and Podcast

Episode #21 with Host: Pastor Bryan Hudson, DMin

Guest: Dr. Varon Cantrell, MD:

(Summary Generated by OpenAI)

Introduction and Context

- Host **Pastor Bryan Hudson** welcomes listeners to episode 21, featuring **Dr. Varon Cantrell, MD**, a board-certified internist and pediatrician.
- Produced by Vision Communications and affiliated with the **New Covenant Church Health and Wellness Hub**and the **Wellness Connection**, the podcast emphasizes advocacy, education, and healthier congregations.
- The discussion centers on **"Chronic Disease Prevention: Reclaiming Health in the Black Faith Community."**

Guest Background: Dr. Varon Cantrell

- Native of **Indianapolis**, educated in **IPS** schools.
- Studied **biochemistry** at St. Joseph's College; earned his **MD at Indiana University School of Medicine (2005)**.
- Completed combined residency in **internal medicine & pediatrics** at University of Cincinnati and Cincinnati Children's Hospital.
- Lead physician for **HealthNet's west side health center**, growing it from 3,000 to 14,000 annual visits in 17 years.
- Deeply involved in community service, particularly as **board chair of the Kyle Guyton Memorial Scholarship Fund**.(*www.kgscholarship.org*)
- Member of **Grace Apostolic Church**, husband to Lisa, and father of four daughters.

The Kyle Guyton Memorial Scholarship Fund

- Founded in memory of **Kyle Guyton**, a gifted educator and technical director who passed away at 22.
- Supports students pursuing the arts—an area often underfunded in scholarships.
- Emphasizes **lasting impact and legacy**, encouraging recipients to use education to influence others beyond themselves.

Calling to Medicine

- Dr. Cantrell describes medicine as a **calling from God**, not just a career.
- As a teen, he was aimless and even expelled from school, but two teachers (Spanish teacher Rose Collins and chemistry teacher Norma Dillon) urged him to pursue medicine.
- Exposure to **Black physicians through leadership programs** inspired him, showing him that it was possible.
- Attributes his journey to **God's providence**, working through people and circumstances.

Chronic Diseases in the Black Community

- **Hypertension (high blood pressure)** – most prevalent and dangerous, leading to heart disease, kidney damage, stroke.
- **Diabetes** – strongly linked to **chronic kidney disease**, one of the most expensive healthcare burdens.
- **Asthma** – especially among children; often poorly controlled due to lack of awareness and environmental triggers.
- **High cholesterol** and **sedentary lifestyles** contribute to cardiovascular issues.
- **Stroke** – African Americans are up to **2x more likely** to suffer strokes compared to other groups.

Contributing Factors

- **Genetics** (family history).
- **Diet** – processed foods, high sodium, and poor nutrition.
- **Sedentary lifestyles** – lack of physical activity.
- Early development of cholesterol buildup—even in teens.
- Mismanagement of conditions like asthma and hypertension due to lack of education and preventive care.

Faith, Medicine, and Misconceptions

- Some believers **over-spiritualize health**, rejecting medical care in favor of "just praying."
- Dr. Cantrell stresses:
  - Faith and medicine work together.
  - **Hospitals and healthcare professionals exist because God allows and equips them.**
  - Preventive screenings (mammograms, colonoscopies, pap smears, prostate exams) are **acts of stewardship**, not lack of faith.
- Failure to seek medical care has led many in the faith community to **premature deaths**.

Keys to Chronic Disease Prevention

1. **Annual Primary Care Visit** – blood pressure, labs (cholesterol, glucose, kidney/liver/thyroid), and screenings.
2. **Screenings Based on Age & Family History** – colonoscopy (45+), mammograms, prostate checks.
3. **Lifestyle Changes** – balanced diet, exercise, weight management.
4. **Accurate Diagnosis** – ensuring blood pressure and labs are checked correctly, repeating abnormal labs before labeling conditions.
5. **Community Engagement** – health fairs, blood pressure checks, and ongoing education.
6. **Faith + Works** – prayer with proactive health action.

Role of Churches and Faith Leaders

- Make **health a ministry priority**:
  - Host health fairs and health-focused Sundays.
  - Disseminate information via newsletters, podcasts, and community events.
  - Invite healthcare professionals to speak in church settings.
- Churches can model the integration of **spiritual and physical wellness**, reflecting the biblical call to care for body, soul, and spirit.

Advice for Leaders, Caregivers, and Individuals

- Build on existing wellness blueprints like the **Wellness Connection**.
- Think holistically: health includes **mental, financial, and social well-being**, not just physical.
- Encourage coalition-building among pastors to **elevate wellness as a shared priority**.
- Challenge misconceptions—illnesses caused by neglect shouldn't be blamed solely on spiritual warfare.

Inspiring the Next Generation

- Young people need **exposure to Black healthcare professionals**.
- Mentorship, church connections, and parent engagement are key.
- Representation matters—seeing someone who looks like them in medicine can inspire youth to pursue healthcare careers.

Final Takeaways from Dr. Cantrell

- **Make health a priority**—schedule at least one checkup yearly.
- **Set small, realistic goals** (e.g., 2 pounds/month weight loss, lowering blood pressure gradually).
- **Be kind to yourself**—don't dwell on past neglect; embrace new beginnings.
- **Seek community and professional support**—you are not alone in managing chronic disease.
- God's grace gives daily opportunities to improve health and honor Him with our bodies.

Closing

Dr. Hudson and Dr. Cantrell conclude with encouragement to blend **faith and practical health action**. The podcast reaffirms that **reclaiming health in the Black faith community requires knowledge, prevention, and collaboration**between healthcare providers and churches.

Listeners are invited to subscribe on **Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Amazon Music, and YouTube** to continue learning and engaging in wellness-focused conversations.