

Introduction: Welcome to the Health Disparities Podcast, a program of Movement is Life. Movement Is Life is a volunteer led nonprofit organization, whose mission is to help eliminate health disparities across race, ethnicity, gender, and zip code through a range of programs and advocacy for health equity. One of the major programs in our calendar is an annual Caucus that takes place in November, in Washington, DC, where we bring together champions of health equity from communities all across United States. For today's podcast, we welcome three leaders from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Mayor Sharon Weston-Broom is joined by Vice President of Mission for Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center, Coletta Barrett, and the System Director, Nursing Informatics at Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System, Dr. Charla Johnson, for a round table discussion about the culture of health that Baton Rouge has fostered through its public/private partnerships. We join the discussion as the group are making their introductions.

Dr. Johnson Hi, this is Dr. Charla Johnson. I'm a registered nurse and Executive Steering Committee member for Movement Is Life.

Coletta: Hi, Coletta Barrett, Vice President of Mission at Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center and the Chairman of the Board of the Mayor's Healthy City Initiative in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Mayor Broome: Hi, I'm Sharon Weston-Broom and I am the Mayor President of Baton Rouge in East Baton Rouge parish.

Dr. Johnson What a fantastic presentation, was all today. And when you all first opened, you talked about the great work of Healthy BR and the community health needs assessment. Can you share a little bit about that to our audience?

Coletta: Well, the community health needs assessment, as you know, is a requirement for not-for-profit hospitals to maintain their not-for-profit status as part of the Affordable Care Act in 2010. What we've done in Baton Rouge is, we have done, initially, a collaborative community health needs assessment in 2012, where the mayor's office facilitated the assessment, and each of the five hospitals had to do their own CHNA. And if you fast forwarded to 2015, we kind of pushed the envelope just a little bit before the IRS regulations were totally written and created the first joint community health needs assessment. Now, why that's important is there are other communities that have done joint community health needs assessment, but where Baton Rouge continues to shine is that we agree to and collaborate against a common joint implementation plan. And that's the differentiating factor for our community.

Dr. Johnson Awesome. Mayor, how did the strategies, as part of the implementation, how does that align with your Healthy BR initiatives?

Mayor Broome: Well, of course, you know, our Healthy BR initiative is about health in all places. That's part of our mission and, certainly, the implementation plan laid out a strategy for us to achieve that mission. And of course, the community health needs assessment was fundamental in terms of looking at the data that is so needed whenever you try to put a plan, effective plan together that reaches out and offers a response to the needs.

Dr. Johnson Awesome. You know, one of the things I took away was the inspiration from others about, how can this be replicated, and I love the fact that you had introduced it as a gumbo recipe. So, how heavy of a lift was it really to kind of get the ingredients together of these five hospitals, part of the collaborative. What kind of lift was that so that it can kind of help other cities try to move things forward?

Mayor Broome: Well, let me say that when I came into office, Healthy BR, the mayor's healthy city initiative, was already part of the fabric of city parish government. And I believe that every administration should elevate, improve, and get better. So, I'm so thankful for the prior administration and the vision that they had. And so, then it was incumbent upon me to take it to another level. And so, we have done that. Every administration takes

Healthy BR to another level. It was not a heavy lift for my administration to improve the gumbo, because the foundation had already been established, and then we started casting our vision. So, I say that because our partners, our five hospitals, already had been part of the mayor's Healthy City Initiative. What they had to do now was, okay, meet the challenge of taking it to the next level. And so, it was not a heavy lift because there was the framework in place for the Mayor's Healthy City Initiative, they were part of the framework, but now it was the next level challenge that they had to become a part of it and I didn't see that as a heavy lift but with everything, it has to be intentional.

Dr. Johnson Well, I loved the word, collab, you used around co-opetition, how this collaborative comes together, when you can believe in something, can you go into that a little bit more?

Coletta: There are 18 different not-for-profits that gather around that board of directors for the mayor's healthy city initiative, and five of those are hospitals. And we've coined this term in Baton Rouge, co-opetition. And people look at us a little funny, and it's like, where public health, where the health of our city and our community and our citizens is concerned, we're going to collaborate, we're going to coordinate our efforts, we're going to communicate and we're going to work in tandem with one another. When it comes to market share, from a hospital's perspective, we're going to

compete like crazy. So, we call it the spirit of co-opetition, it helps us to put aside the egos, put aside the agendas and focus on the common good. And that's what makes it different.

Dr. Johnson One of the other things around COVID because you already had this framework around this collaboration, zip codes matter. And so, then, when you looked at data and saw the spikes and were addressing, you had a call for health equity lens on this, how did you strategically go out to do your testing, et cetera? Can you talk a little bit about that piece?

Mayor Broome: I'll talk from my perspective, and I know we have some additional information from Coletta that will certainly help. You know, we used the data to look at, you talked about the zip codes, we looked at the data to find where the gaps existed. Where were the most people, where were the people who were not getting tested? Now, as I said, we started out with a standup testing site that was put together by all five of our hospitals. It's interesting to note that our five hospitals are all over the city of Baton Rouge. The location, though, that was selected, was in the heart of our community. It was accessible to most people; they knew where it was. And so, it was a good foundation for us to build on in terms of closing that health equity gap when it came to the testing of COVID-19. So, that was one of those zip codes. What we did after that is that we enlarged our territory to those other zip codes that were provided through the data, in

terms of closing the health disparity gap. And that's really been our approach to addressing health disparities in our community. Coletta, you want to add something to that?

Coletta: I think it's of note, we have seven zip codes in our Greater Baton Rouge area that have a community needs index greater than 4.2. That means the higher risk or higher need. And looking at where there were already existing partnerships or collaborations across the community, it became very important to us that there are churches, and the churches and faith is the fabric of our community. And so, noting that there are churches in disinvested areas of the community within walkability of large segments of populations, our mayor's Healthy City Initiative partnered with churches, and actually went and did testing in churches and then when vaccines became available and went to do vaccine drives in churches. And so, we started with what we knew and then we grew to where we could actually go, and I believe that's been one of the successful things of making sure that we work in partnership.

Dr. Johnson One of the creative things I heard was around the usage of your EMS system to be able to go, can you share a little bit about that?

Mayor Broome: Yes. So, we told you about Nurse Carla Brown, who was taking vaccines door to door. Then, we had our council on aging, the East Baton

Rouge Parish Council on Aging that became very involved in offering vaccinations to the senior population. They were offering vaccines at their locations, their physical locations, but then they started getting calls saying, hey, we can't get there. We have health conditions, and we just can't get there. So, they reached out to me and said, hey, we need some help getting out to people with the vaccinations. And so, then we enlisted the services of our EMS department and they started addressing that gap that existed in terms of making sure that those seniors who could not get out had access to the vaccination.

Dr. Johnson Mayor, you talked about your own personal journey of health and its impact on, I would say, almost like your passion about that moves this forward. Can you share a little bit more about your personal journey and how you lead?

Mayor Broome: Yes. You know, my motivation for being a public servant is my care and my concern for my community. And, you know, when I look out at our community, I was talking to somebody the other day, my cousin actually, and she said, it seems like almost every time an African American goes to the doctor, that they're saying you're almost a borderline diabetic. That has a lot to do with how we take care of ourselves, and it can be addressed. And I believe that if you don't have good quality of health, good access to healthcare, that it certainly interrupts the potential of a

long, thriving, prosperous life. And so, that concerns me. If I'm genuinely concerned about and care about my community, that concerns me. I know we have as you heard me say, terrific food in Baton Rouge, but I also look at the landscape and I know we have a challenge with obesity. And sometimes obesity isn't looked at individually as a health problem.

It's like, I'm just gaining a few pounds. But before you know it, as I said, you're on to obesity - like, for me, for example. I don't think anyone would've looked at me and said, oh, the mayor is obese. But I know what the scale was saying. You know, I know some of the factors in my genetics. I know my mom succumbed to breast cancer. I know my dad and my mom had challenges with high blood pressure. So, you know, I can't ignore those factors. And I often say, I have to cooperate with the creative. You know, I just can't think that, oh, I can go around doing this and I'm going to be fine. I was like, I need to make some adjustments. I'm going up and up and up in dress sizes. Everybody said, oh, you look fine mayor. But I knew. Then, I knew how I felt too, how that made me feel physically and mentally. So, when we started the move with the mayor initiative, it was like the perfect time. It was an answer to prayer for me. And I just, you know, inserted myself right in there. Now, when people see me, they can see the difference. And they say, "Oh, Mayor, you really look good. You lost some weight." And I feel that one of the first things I did after I lost my weight, I went to my primary health physician and I said,



“Can I get off of my high blood pressure medicine?” I'm on a very low dose, but she's like, “No, let's just wait because of the level of stress associated with your job.” So, it's a low dose, but she was proud of the fact that I had made these adjustments in my lifestyle. And during COVID, many of us did not exercise like we normally do, or we weren't out as much and that included me. So, I know I've put on a few pounds. And just recently, I decided to invest in a rowing machine. Because sometimes when I come home from work, I don't feel like finding a health club but it's in my psyche. It's in my DNA now. I know I need to exercise. And so, it's kind of a lead by example, modeling the behavior. And while some people may not pick up on it, there are a number who do in our community. And so, that's been my journey, and I attribute the mayor's Healthy City Initiative as a catalyst on that journey

Dr. Johnson During COVID, I know that Healthy BR, they have certain, like, fitness rocks. Tell me how you kept the community involved with doing that when we couldn't gather together.

Mayor Broome: Yes. Well, we did virtual experiences, you know? I love my team with the mayor's Healthy City Initiative, Healthy BR. I have a rock-star team. And so, they were like, oh, we're going to go to doing virtual experiences. I was like, okay, whatever you say. And not only did we do virtual exercise experiences, we also did mental health conversations around mental

health, because that certainly is important. And nowadays, mental health has come to the forefront of conversations. When you talk about healthcare, you cannot ignore it.

Dr. Johnson Yes. Sitting on as a representative for Movement Is Life on the Healthy BR piece, under the movement arm, I know how proud I am of the community and the good work. Because even in the middle of the pandemic, everyone was looking for solutions on how to carry out their unique mission and, you know, be able to provide resources. And you do hear, you've got 40 people on a call, and you do hear about the collaboration, the sharing of resources. And so, it's very inspiring, the work that you and your team are doing, tell me a little bit about this Winning Wednesdays.

Mayor Broome: Well, you know, as I shared, faith is part of who I am. My faith is an integral part of who I am, and I had this idea because, you know, if you're ever in a campaign, prayer becomes a part of the fabric of that campaign for a candidate, especially, right? And so, after, I had a number of people who would pray with me throughout the campaign, and then I had pastors doing a conference call, all kind of things. And so, after that was all over with, people were still looking forward to it. They were like, we still want to do something. So, I came up with this, we can't do it every day now, but I came up with Winning Wednesdays, a motivational inspirational message that I offer to those who want to participate. They just call in, and I

recognize that everybody is busy, and so it's only 15 minutes. And most people say, yes, I can carve out 15 minutes to start my Wednesday out. So, we've been doing it since January, and almost a year now. And I don't anticipate stopping.

Dr. Johnson Right. So, how do people dial into Winning Wednesday?

Mayor Broome: Yes, we give out the conference call number and people just dial in, people pass it on to other friends and family members. So, it's not that I do a major marketing with it. It's just word of mouth.

Dr. Johnson It happened organically.

Mayor Broome: It has happened organically. Because I had new people on the line Wednesday, they reached out to me and they were like, can I share this number with my family and friends? I was like, sure. You know, I love it.

Dr. Johnson Well, I love the phrasing. We might have to adopt it here at Movement Is Life family. This cooperate with the creator, right? Because owning the whole personal responsibility of incorporating movement into your lifestyle modifications and working with what you have, right? And so, I think that is awesome. Cooperate with the creator. Coletta, do you have any additional

lessons learned that someone else can pick up this baton in another city from an administrative healthcare leader's lens?

Coletta: Sure. From a healthcare perspective, we are unfortunately trained to swing for the fence. You know, you want to get it right because there's no variation in providing, there should be no variation in providing good quality care. Variation can be perceived as a detriment. You know, we need to make sure that we're doing quality care. When it comes to implementing public health strategies, it's more important to start with what's already in place, seeking to understand where your community is, who the partners are already in that space and what it is that they're already doing. And then working with them to talk about what's possible and creating these common platforms, these cooperative efforts. And then, success breeds success, when you have a success, people want to be a part of it. And so, start with what's possible, and then soon, you're able to do what the Mayor of Baton Rouge has done, is almost the impossible.

Dr. Johnson Excellent. Thank you both, with these influential leaders. I appreciate your time for this podcast.

Thank you for listening to this episode of the Health Disparities Podcast. If you'd like to view the presentation at the Movement Is Life Caucus that is mentioned during today's podcast discussion, you can find the link in the podcast

summary or visit [movementislifecaucus.com](https://movementislifecaucus.com). Until next time, take care  
and be well.

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