



# spotlight on health

## DVT: Are You At Risk For This Silent Killer?

(NAPSA)—Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism (PE) are not the first health threats to come to mind in the age of swine flu, obesity, heart disease and cancer. Yet one person dies every five to six minutes from a DVT/PE-related event, and that's more than 100,000 Americans every year.

Dee, 39, nearly lost her life to DVT/PE following surgery in 2007. "While I knew I had a slightly higher risk because I took birth control pills, I didn't know that my risk was also elevated by being an African-American," she said. "If I'd have been more informed, I would have asked more questions and perhaps done things differently to reduce my risk. I could have lost my life."

Almost anyone at any age is at risk for DVT/PE, yet very few people know the risk factors, or the signs and symptoms to look for that could alert them to potentially life-saving information. DVT is a blood clot that develops in the large veins, usually of the legs or pelvic area. PE occurs when all or part of the DVT is carried in the bloodstream and lodges in an artery of the lungs, where it can be fatal if not immediately diagnosed and treated.

There are many factors that increase the risk of developing DVT, the most common being hospitalization, surgery, prolonged bed rest, pregnancy and the postpartum period, African-American descent, birth control pills, hormone replacement therapy, cancer and cancer treatment, obesity, long-haul travel, smoking and a family history of DVT.

For Dee, the fact that she was having surgery was perhaps her biggest risk factor, but as an African-American her risk for DVT/PE was 30 percent greater



**Long-distance travel, or anything else that keeps you in one spot for a long time, can put you at risk for deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism.**

than the risk experienced by Caucasians.

She also took oral contraceptives, which elevated her risk, completing a potentially deadly triple threat. "In some ways I was lucky. I was still in the hospital after my surgery when the DVT/PE occurred so I was treated quickly."

"My life has changed dramatically since the DVT/PE. If I had better understood my risks I would have been more proactive prior to surgery," said Dee. "Everyone, especially African-Americans, should understand their risks and the instances when they will be the most vulnerable to this serious yet surprisingly common condition."

Dr. Garth Graham, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Minority Health at the Department of Health and Human Services became an advocate for educating Americans on the risk factors for and symptoms of

DVT/PE after the death of his sister from a PE at the age of 38. His sister, Gabrielle, developed a massive PE that proved fatal after an unrelated surgery.

"I know all too well the devastating effect DVT and PE have had on our family and friends," said Dr. Graham. "I am making it my mission to educate all Americans, and specifically African-Americans, about this silent killer."

Worryingly, up to one million Americans are affected by DVT every year, and PE is the third most common cause of hospital death. Without preventive treatment, up to 40 percent of all medical and general surgery patients develop DVT. Everyone, especially African-Americans, should be aware of the risks and warning signs.

"If you have one or more of these risk factors, you need to be vigilant about your health, understand the signs and symptoms of DVT and PE, and encourage your medical team to be prepared for your increased risk," implores Dr. Graham.

The signs and symptoms can include sudden swelling of one limb, pain or tenderness, skin that is warm to the touch, shortness of breath, chest pain (often worse when taking a breath), sudden collapse, coughing and bloody phlegm.

Educational tools are available to help you understand your risk such as the Pause for Prevention Risk Assessment Tool developed by the Venous Disease Coalition, an alliance of over 35 organizations focused on preventing DVT/PE, and a program of the Vascular Disease Foundation. These tools can be found along with other resources on the coalition's Web site at [www.venousdiseasecoalition.org](http://www.venousdiseasecoalition.org) or by calling 888-VDF-4INFO (888-833-4463).