



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DC's "Black Nurse of the Year" Joins WomenHeart's Board of Directors

Velma Henderson brings vast professional experience to national health issue

July 21, 2011 – (Washington, DC) -- With 30 years of nursing experience, Velma Henderson knows exactly why she wanted to join the board of directors at WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease.

"I am hoping to focus my efforts on impacting the disparities in the diagnosis and treatment of heart disease in women in color."

Early in her career as a staff nurse at Greater Southeast Community Hospital, a busy inner-city hospital that served many low-income residents of Washington, DC, Henderson got a first-hand look at how heart disease affected women.

"Many times, the inequities in care were evident," recalls Henderson, "as women would be admitted with a major heart attack after sometimes having sought medical care several times and being sent home with a prescription for anxiety medications."

Henderson's personal connection to heart disease came early, when, as a child, she asked her mother why she had never met her grandmother.

"She responded that her mother died at the age of 36 years old due to "heart dropsie"—a cultural term for congestive heart failure," says Henderson. "My mother, who was 13 at the time of her mother's death, was herself diagnosed with heart disease at the age of 50 and subsequently died of complications from a stroke."

Working directly to help save the lives of minority women with acute heart problems was a major influence on Henderson over the years.

"As my career progressed, my involvement with heart disease became more focused on the needs of this underserved population. This eventually led me to develop and implement community-wide initiatives to educate women about activities to reduce heart disease."



Now retired after spending nearly 15 years at Howard University Hospital, first as Director of Medical Nursing and later as Chief Nursing Officer, Henderson has been active in raising awareness of women's heart disease, spearheading a regional educational program called "Check Your Beat" that focused on women's heart health and was attended by over 330 DC-area nurses. Says Henderson, "My training as a nurse enhanced my natural instinct to support and advocate for the needs of others."

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About WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease

WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease is the nation's only patient centered organization serving the 42 million American women living with or at risk for heart disease – the leading cause of death in women. WomenHeart is solely devoted to advancing women's heart health through advocacy, community education, and the nation's only patient support network for women living with heart disease. WomenHeart is both a coalition and a community of thousands of members nationwide, including women heart patients and their families, physicians, and health advocates, all committed to helping women live longer, healthier lives. To receive a free on line heart health action kit or to donate visit www.womenheart.org/kit.