

Program Receives International Community Service Award



The MUSC lifestyle education program, *Lighten Up*, received the Outstanding Community Service Award for its work in reaching ethnic minorities at very high risk for cardio-

vascular disease. This award was presented Sunday, July 8, at the opening ceremonies of the 16th annual meeting of the International Society on Hypertension in Blacks (ISHIB) in Las Vegas.

Lighten Up, a church-based program, encourages people to improve health through spiritual growth. Participants decrease cardiovascular risk through good nutrition, exercise, and the fellowship of the church. It includes health checks and eight weekly educational sessions combining Christian disciplines and health messages.

A web site, www.lightenupforever.org, and newsletters encourage participants to sustain the changes they have made. These are avenues to share recipes, nutrition information, and inspirational stories.

Lighten Up began in February 1998 with a 2-year grant from the MUSC Healthy South Carolina Initiative. The Duke Endowment and donations now fund the program. The program has reached 700 participants through 35 churches (20 African American) in both North and South Carolina. *Lighten Up* has been successful in reducing cardiovascular risk in the Christian community through weight loss and by lowering of blood pressure. Mary Joan Oexmann, an MUSC faculty member, is program director for *Lighten Up*. Oexmann said she is delighted to know that participants can achieve and sustain important health benefits from the 10-week intervention.

In presenting the award, W. Dallas Hall, M.D., ISHIB Award Committee chairperson and former vice president of ISHIB, commented, "*Lighten Up* is to be congratulated for its effective work in the community, and more importantly for its role as a model program as it is being replicated in areas beyond South Carolina. This program emphasizes the exciting opportunities for reducing cardiovascular risk in collaboration with churches and other local organizations." *Lighten Up* addresses the behavioral component of health risks through its thoughtfully designed program that incorporates spiritual and group support in a friendly and caring environment of mutual concern. *Lighten Up* encourages good nutrition, exercise and other health lifestyle activities.

ISHIB is a unique professional medical membership organization devoted to improving health and life expectancy of ethnic populations. They co-sponsor, along with the Morehouse School of Medicine and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an annual gathering of healthcare professionals from around the world. In 2001, the meeting took place in Las Vegas, Nevada, July 7-12.