How to reduce health disparities, unite physician efforts: Rep. Robin Kelly

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Staff News Writer

Leveraging strategic partnerships will empower physicians and medical students to close the nation’s health care equity gap, Rep. Robin Kelly, D-Ill., said Friday during an address at the 2015 AMA Annual Meeting.

Her remarks were part of a special reception to honor recipients of the 2015 AMA Minority Scholars Award, which gives 10,000 scholarships to exceptional students of color. The reception was hosted by the AMA Minority Affairs Section and the AMA Foundation.

Kelly (pictured right) is the chair of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) Health Braintrust, which aims to advance African-American health and communities by developing leaders, informing policy and educating the public.
During her address, Kelly reminded this year’s scholars that as promising physicians in training, they hold an important role in the nation’s fight to reduce health disparities.

“The theme for [our caucus] this Congress is ‘The March Toward Health Equity,’ in honor of the 50th anniversary of the voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery,” Kelly said.

She quoted a statement by Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Of all the forms of inequality, injustices in health care are the most shocking and inhumane.’ I couldn’t agree more. Like the right to vote, health care is a fundamental civil right that must be promoted, protected and supported. Your zip code, ethnicity and bank balance shouldn’t determine your health.”

This is precisely why the CBC Health Braintrust has developed key initiatives to help defend patients’ access to care and improve health outcomes in at-risk communities, Kelly said. These initiatives include:

- Calling on Congress to commission a greater body of research on social factors and determinants that impact health care.
- Increasing engagement among health policy experts, community advocates and elected officials to discuss strategies for improving health outcomes in vulnerable communities.
- Continuing the CBC Health Braintrust’s national tour to spotlight key health issues affecting multicultural communities.
- Introducing health legislation that addresses pressing national health concerns while “keeping health equity and disparity reduction at the forefront of the national agenda,” Kelly said. “In particular, I’m gearing up to introduce the 2016 Health Equity and Accountability Act … Congress’ signature health disparities legislation.”
- Releasing the 2015 Kelly Report on Health Equity in America, an official congressional report examining the root causes and impact of health disparities in America. The report, to be released in September, also will provide a comprehensive set of legislative and policy recommendations to reverse these issues.

“With these steps, we begin the march toward a healthier future, laying the foundation for achieving health equity in a generation …. And I’m enlisting all of you in that pursuit,” she said.

For additional information about national and local efforts to address health disparities:

- Visit the AMA-MAS Web page, which features the latest on AMA policies, news and events to promote diversity in medicine and public health.
- Learn more about the AMA’s Commission to End Health Disparities.
- Review the CBC Health Braintrusts’ publications on key policy issues that impact the health of African-American communities.