



**Dr. Carl C. Bell: 2003 Welcome Back Award Honoree  
in the Psychiatry Category**

*“If you are a physician and your job is to keep people alive, you need to go out into the community where people are dying.”*

Carl C. Bell, M.D., F.A.P.A., F.A.C.P.  
President and CEO  
Community Mental Health Council (CMHC), Inc.

Carl Bell, M.D., is a self-described practitioner of “public psychiatry and community health.” Described by others as a soldier, a dynamo, and a champion of the underserved, for 30 years, Dr. Bell has fought for better service for people with mental illness.

After his residency at Illinois State Psychiatric Institute, Dr. Bell, who is also a professor of psychiatry and public health at the University of Illinois at Chicago, joined forces with a group of Chicago’s South Side residents who were concerned about the lack of mental health care in their area. Of this concern, the CMHC was created in 1975. They started with a 14-bed in-patient unit and a two-office outpatient facility, and quickly added psychiatric emergency services and 10 offices for outpatient treatment.

Outpatient services overflowed, but the community impact was clear: psychiatric emergency visits dropped from 50 each week to two.

Dr. Bell assumed his current position at the CMHC in 1993. Today, CMHC has an annual budget of \$17 million, and serves tens of thousands of people each year through elderly programs, two emergency rooms, 100 residential beds, two day-treatment programs, and staff therapists and doctors who log thousands of outpatient visits each year.

CMHC is also a training ground for residents, psychologists and others in mental health care – providing these professionals with the cultural competence and the mission to serve honorably in the communities that need them most.

According to Dr. Bell, poverty, access, stigma, and racism all stack the odds against many African Americans with depression or other mental illnesses. The CMHC's efforts to reach out to the community are endless. "I'm sure we don't reach everyone, but at least there is some place to go."

A graduate of Meharry College in Nashville with a major in biology and minors in chemistry and math (completed in just two years!), Dr. Bell originally wanted to be a surgeon. He ultimately chose psychiatry, he said, because he didn't understand it – it was the ultimate challenge for him.

Dr. Bell has served our country on national committees regarding youth violence and the integration of primary care and mental health. He is currently the lead investigator on a research project funded by the National Institute of Mental Health to reduce HIV exposure in adolescents in South Africa. His new book, *Getting Rid of Rats: Reflections of a Community Psychiatrist*, will be published in December, 2004.

Of his insatiable appetite to serve, he said: "It's just what I do. What else would you do with the gift of healing?"

Dr. Bell donated his \$5,000 Welcome Back Award to the Mental Health Community Council, Inc.