

Clifford W. Beers Award Nomination Statement
Nadia M. Richardson

There are several names for it. Some call it smiling depression. Others call it high-functioning depression. I call it hyper-functioning depression because, for me, this is how it feels. And, from the outside looking in, you may never guess that this is my reality; especially if you have a one-dimensional perception of what it means to live with a mental health concern. Many see the success and few see the days when I can barely get out of bed. But it is my life none the less and my challenges have positioned me in ways that I could have never imagined. My name is Nadia Richardson. I am the Founder of No More Martyrs. No More Martyrs is a mental health awareness campaign that seeks to build a community for Black women. My own mental health story is an on-going tale of ignorance, denial, acceptance and purpose. What I initially dismissed as mood swings and personality flaws proved to be debilitating health barriers that threatened my success while in college. However, it wasn't until I was in graduate school that I began seeing a counselor who educated me on exactly what I had been living with my entire life; depression and anxiety. With this new understanding, I began to ask myself one question: Why did it take so long for me to go see a counselor?

Once diagnosed, I turned my experience into my doctoral research project. An already seasoned educator who uses her experience as a first-generation American-born citizen to explore issues related to diversity and cultural competency, I decided to explore student mental health for my doctoral dissertation. Utilizing a qualitative feminist theoretical approach, I decided to focus on the experiences of Black female college students with mental health concerns. Through my study, I wanted to explore the ways in which individuals can experience discrimination based on race, gender and mental health status. Though I was discouraged by some professors, mentors and classmates, I insisted on conducting the study. I was warned that I would not be able to find enough individuals to participate in the study. However, it was quite the opposite. I was inundated with individuals interested in sharing their stories. What I learned from the study participants fueled my passion for mental health awareness and ushered me into a greater understanding of myself. Before the study was even complete, I began conducting workshops on college campuses and at national conferences on how to use the voices and experiences of individuals living with mental health concerns to inform programs and other outreach initiatives. I went a step further and combined my knowledge of cultural competency training to develop mental health advocacy training for faculty, staff and students.

It has been estimated that 7 percent of Black women living with depression seek treatment, compared to 20 percent of the general population. While those numbers are compelling, this fact hit home for me when, in 2014, we lost three notable Black women to suicide: Karyn Washington, Simone Battle and Titi Branch. These accomplished women put a face to the statistics around Black mental health. I saw myself in their stories; especially the story of Karyn Washington. In April of 2014, Karyn Washington, Founder of For Brown Girls and a notable motivational blogger passed away from an apparent suicide. Karyn was known for her work in motivating Black women with low self-esteem in an effort to combat their challenges with depression and mental illness. When she passed away, I noticed that important conversations were taking place about mental health awareness and mental health stigma in the Black community. While I appreciated these conversations, I was concerned that these conversations

would stop once Karyn's name was no longer in news headlines. In an effort to maintain regular conversations about mental health and mental health stigma, I used my doctoral research and created No More Martyrs. The name of the organization came from an article in which a news reporter referred to Karyn Washington as a martyr who lived her life to support others while sacrificing her own health. Black feminist theory also uses the concept of martyrdom to describe the socio-cultural ways in which Black women remain silent about their suffering in order to be of service to others. This is a trait I can recognize in myself and is one of the reasons I took so long to see a counselor. Through No More Martyrs, I wanted to change the narrative and encourage Black women to prioritize their self-care and increase their understanding of mental health.

My goal in developing the No More Martyrs mental health awareness campaign is to build a community of support for Black women with mental health concerns. By empowering women to embrace their humanness, unapologetically prioritize their self-care and actively fight to create healthy communities, No More Martyrs is a call to action that recognizes strength in vulnerability and power in collective commitments towards social justice. The No More Martyrs approach to mental health awareness is three-pronged – Awareness, Access and Action. We work to build awareness of mental health concerns by educating Black women on how to identify symptoms and connect to available services. No More Martyrs initially launched in 2014 as an online community of support for Black women. Through shared resources, free webinars and one-on-one peer support, No More Martyrs connects women to services in their communities. All webinars boasted national and international participation. It wasn't long before No More Martyrs received requests for in-person support. With the support of a Community Health Innovation Award (CHIA) from the University of Alabama at Birmingham's Center for Clinical and Translational Science in 2015, we were able to pilot monthly in-person support gatherings in Birmingham, Alabama. We named our support groups 'Sister Support Meetups'. Due to the success of the support gatherings in Birmingham, Alabama, groups now meet in Alabama, New Jersey and Washington, DC. By the end of 2018, new groups will be launched in Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, California and Texas. We are also exploring a recent request to launch support groups in Canada. All Sister Support Meetups serve as a safe space for Black women to connect and explore issues related to mental health and wellness. All groups are co-facilitated by a provider and a consumer.

In 2008, the United States House of Representatives proclaimed July as Bebe Moore Campbell National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month. Though No More Martyrs focuses on mental health in Black women, we have joined a phenomenal community of mental health organizations and advocates who promote mental health awareness in their own culturally inclusive ways. In an effort to highlight the important work being done in minority mental health, we launched the Minority Mental Health Awareness Summit. This event takes place in annually Birmingham, Alabama during Minority Mental Health Awareness Month in July. The first Minority Mental Health Awareness Summit took place in 2016. The event was well received and attracted visitors to Birmingham from across the United States and Canada. Given the number of mental health facilities that continue to close nationally and the current socio-political climate, the need for culturally competent mental health practitioners is essential to improving access to services for diverse patient populations. In addition to mental health professionals, the valuable voices of consumers, community organizers and religious leaders are

necessary in order to encourage collaboration and innovation towards the development of new methods of support. Latino, Asian, African-American, LGBTQIA and various other speakers participate in the Minority Mental Health Awareness Summit. A unique feature of this event is that half of the speakers are consumers and the other half are professionals working in mental health or community health. This is an intentional feature that creates an environment for powerful conversations around stigma, cultural competency, advocacy and programmatic intervention in minority mental health. The theme for the 2018 Minority Mental Health Summit is 'Mental Health and Social Justice'.

In 2017, I represented No More Martyrs and spoke at a congressional briefing on Black women and mental health on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC by invitation from the Office of Congresswoman Robin Kelly. The briefing was organized through the Congressional Caucus for Black Women and Girls. This event has led to an on-going relationship with the office of Congresswoman Kelly. In April of 2018, I will travel to Washington, DC again to receive an award as one of the Top 40 Under 40 Leaders in Health by the National Minority Quality Forum. Ms. Mia Keeys, Health Policy Advisor for Congresswoman Robin Kelly, nominated me for this award and continues to showcase her support for the work of No More Martyrs. We are humbled and appreciative of any recognition that brings attention to the growing No More Martyrs community. While in Washington, DC, we will launch a special initiative around Black women and suicide. This new awareness initiative is being done in partnership with the Black Women's Health Imperative, a national organization dedicated solely to improving the health and wellness of Black women and girls.

I am often blown away when I consider how much No More Martyrs has grown in roughly four years. While I often use my academic background to ensure that our work is evidence-based and rooted in research, we also continue to grow our programmatic reach by listening to the stories of the women in the No More Martyrs community and developing projects around the challenges they identify. Our plans for the future are vast and include projects such as:

- The launch of support groups in more cities
- The development of cultural competency curriculum for mental health providers
- The launch of a hotline and teletherapy site
- The development of public service announcements
- The development of a documentary around Black women and mental health

In my professional circle, I am known as Dr. Nadia Richardson; an innovative educator with over 15 years of program development, college course development and community health outreach. This may lead some to believe that the development of No More Martyrs is solely a reflection of my professional pursuits. While my professional and academic experience has led me to this point in my career, I would be remiss if I did not share with others that I am a Black woman living with depression and anxiety. All the degrees and professional positions in the world do not take away from the fact that I identify with the women I have the opportunity to engage and support through No More Martyrs. We are a community; a sisterhood of support that continues to grow everyday. No More Martyrs is my heart's passion and brings me more joy than I can articulate through written word. This is the passion behind No More Martyrs. It is this transparency, vulnerability, humanness and commitment to normalizing conversations around

mental health so that everyone embraces their worth and never feels alone. No More Martyrs has given me a passion and purpose that drives on good days and bad days. It is my heart's work. Thank you for your consideration for the Clifford W. Beers Award. It is an honor to be considered.

29 March 2018

To Mental Health America:

It is my pleasure to nominate Dr. Nadia Richardson for consideration for the 2018 Clifford W. Beers Award from Mental Health America.

Dr. Nadia M. Richardson is a health equity educator focused on fighting health disparities. She is the Founder of No More Martyrs, a mental health awareness campaign committed to building a community of support for Black women. Through No More Martyrs and with the support of a Community Health Innovation Award (CHIA) from the University of Alabama at Birmingham's Center for Clinical and Translational Science, Dr. Richardson piloted monthly support gatherings in Birmingham, Alabama.


Due to the success of the support gatherings, groups now meet in Alabama, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C. Her 2018 goal is to launch support gatherings in additional states, as well as on college campuses. Through No More Martyrs, Dr. Richardson launched the first Minority Mental Health Awareness Summit in Birmingham, Alabama in 2016. The event was well received, and attracted visitors to Birmingham from across the United States and Canada. The 2017 Minority Mental Health Awareness Summit took place on July 13, 2017 at the Birmingham Crossplex to the same level of success and attendance.

Dr. Richardson is an innovative educator and committed social entrepreneur. Her professional experience includes over 15 years working with nonprofit organizations and various universities. As a university instructor, she has developed and taught college courses on diversity, social justice leadership, health disparities, culturally responsive care, and academic potential. Through her consulting company, Valenrich Wellness, she has conducted mental health advocacy workshops at universities such as Providence College, Bucknell University, and Birmingham-Southern College. Dr. Richardson is currently scheduled to present at Auburn University and Carnegie Mellon University later this year. She is also a new member of the Southeastern Health Equity Council.

In 2016, I came to know Dr. Richardson in her capacity as the Founder for No More Martyrs. Since then, she has consistently engaged Congresswoman Kelly's office to discuss the import of mental health in the Black community, particularly as it impacts Black women. In March 2017, Dr. Richardson was a featured panelist at the Congressional Caucus of Black Women and Girls briefing, "What Makes Black Girls Blue?", as organized by the Office of Congresswoman Robin Kelly. Her contribution to the discussion was timely and dynamic.

I am proud to submit this recommendation on behalf of Dr. Nadia Richardson. Her work is the embodiment of leadership in health. Her approach is engaging, community-centric, and solutions-oriented. Dr. Richardson is well-deserving of this distinction.

Sincerely,



Mia R. Keays
Office of Congresswoman Robin Kelly
Health Policy Advisor