

UAMS News Bureau

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UAMS Researcher Finds Women Unaware of Risks of Heart Disease

LITTLE ROCK – A UAMS nurse researcher has found that women’s awareness of the dangers of heart disease has declined significantly over the past decade.

Jean McSweeney, Ph.D., RN, professor emerita in the UAMS College of Nursing, was among a dozen co-authors of the research paper, published in September by the American Heart Association’s flagship journal *Circulation*.

“Heart disease is the leading cause of death among women, including women in Arkansas,” said McSweeney. “But looking back at survey data from different points over the last decade, we determined that overall awareness of this fact has dropped significantly, and that is cause for concern.”

The research indicates that in 2009, 65% of women were aware that heart disease was the leading cause of death among women. In 2019, only 44% of women responded the same way. The decline in awareness spanned all racial, ethnic and age groups except for women over 65.

The highest levels of decline in awareness were seen in Hispanic and Black women and women age 25-34 years old, data that researchers noted highlights disparities in health care and access for many marginalized people.

The data are the results of the 2019 American Heart Association National Survey, an online survey of more than 1,500 U.S. women over age 25, conducted in January of 2009, 2012 and 2019.

“This means that we as health care providers, along with media outlets, employers and even community support organizations, need to do a better job of informing women about the danger of heart disease,” said McSweeney. “Prevention is possible, but not without awareness of the threat.”

McSweeney has been researching women's heart health for more than 20 years. She was the first to identify that women tend to have different heart attack symptoms than men in a 2003 article, also published in *Circulation*.

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS' clinical enterprise including its hospital, regional clinics and clinics it operates or staffs in cooperation with other providers. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. *U.S. News & World Report* named UAMS Medical Center the state's Best Hospital; ranked its ear, nose and throat program among the top 50 nationwide; and named six areas as high performing — cancer, colon cancer surgery, heart failure, hip replacement, knee replacement and lung cancer surgery. UAMS has 2,727 students, 870 medical residents and five dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's Hospital, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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