

[MAKING IT]

CURING HEALTHCARE

A social activist promotes affordable coverage in underserved communities

Donald C. Bland is a social and community activist, who believes everyone in America should have access to affordable healthcare. It was this ardent notion, along with grim government statistics on the state of healthcare in the U.S., that inspired him to launch his consulting firm, Hugh Marketing Solutions, in Washington, D.C., in 1999.

In addition to developing and implementing social service and healthcare strategies, HMS provides expert consultation to federal agencies and private organizations that are poised to combat some of the nation's social issues—one of the most prevalent being access to reasonably priced health programs for people of color. Federal government statistics reveal that nearly 44 million Americans are without healthcare coverage—many of them children and minorities. Most people without medical insurance are less likely to receive preventative and routine care. "Our focus is on the community and improving the quality of life in places where people need help finding their bootstraps," says Bland. "We identify local and national resources and harness them to support social, economic, and educational programs that can make a difference and enhance lives."

Bland, 48, guided HMS to several banner years. In 2003, the company posted revenues of about \$750,000 and will likely top \$1 million in 2004 after figures are tallied. He has three full-time employees as well as a number of outside contractors and vendors. Bland runs the bulk of his business from his home. For Bland, starting HMS is the culmination of more than 20 years of experience in various industries, including public relations, corporate sales, healthcare services, and marketing. However, it was his affinity for healthcare that sparked a desire to start his own business. "At one time I managed a substance abuse and mental health

services program for the COSMOS Corp. in Washington, D.C.," he recalls. "I managed conferences and technical assistance activities for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and I was fascinated by what I saw and learned."

Using \$10,000 from his personal savings, Bland opened his business and handled small consulting projects for a few clients. "Fortunately, I had established a number of valuable business contacts from my years in corporate America," he says. "I was able to build a small client base."

A turning point for HMS came in late 2001 when the company acquired a lucrative contract from the National Minority AIDS Council in Washington, D.C., to provide consulting and administrative support services to community-based organizations in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Carlos Velez, the director of technical assistance, training, and treatment at the NMAC, lauds Bland and HMS for increasing the activities and services of the organization. "Since NMAC contracted with HMS, the request for our services has increased nearly 300%," says Velez. "HMS has been instrumental in going out and assisting the various community organizations in implementing some of our services."

Bland says that he would like to see HMS continue to grow. "Right now, we are losing the war against HIV and AIDS," he says. "The key to changing this trend is by providing an abundance of information and other resources to the people who need it most—and thanks to the services of NMAC and other national partners, we are here to get the job done." —Glenn Townes

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