

Unequal Treatment: Why Race and Gender Matter in Patient-Provider Relationships



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Race and Gender Disparities

- Being ethnic minority and female puts many in “double jeopardy”
- Racial and gender disparities in health status and health care quality exist in the U.S.
- Disparities documented for technical aspects of care, such as receipt of tests and procedures
- What role might patient-provider relationships play in eliminating disparities in quality of care?

Patient-provider communication is related to important outcomes

- Patient recall of information
- Patient adherence
- Patient satisfaction
- Clinical outcomes
 - Control of diabetes
 - BP control
 - Pain reduction
 - Depression resolution



Race and Patient-Provider Relationships

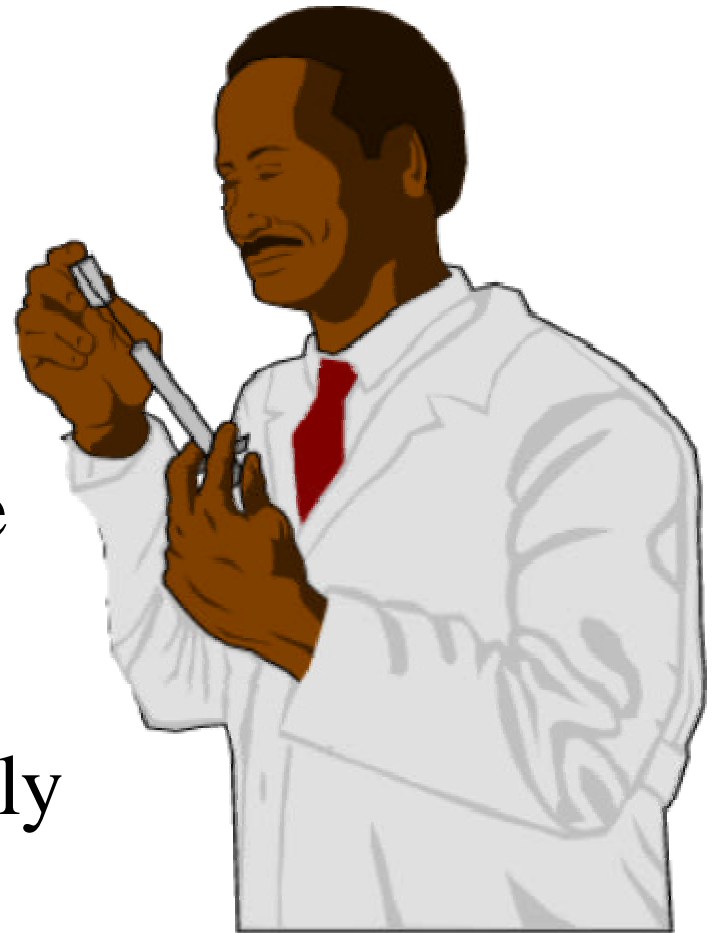
- African Americans and other minorities report:
 - Lower levels of satisfaction with care and time spent during office visits to family physicians
 - Less involvement in decision-making, partnership with and trust in physicians
 - More difficulties communicating with physicians and more disrespect when obtaining health care

Race and Patient-Provider Communication

- Ethnic minority patients with AIDS less likely than whites to have discussed life-sustaining care with physicians
- African American patients have more “narrowly biomedical” communication and are more verbally dominated in visits with primary care physicians

Can Minority Physicians Help?

- African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans account for 21% of US population but only 8.6% of physicians
- Minority physicians provide care to a disproportionately large share of the nation's ethnic minority and medically underserved populations



Can Minority Physicians Help?

- African Americans and Hispanics seek care from physicians of their same race or ethnicity because of personal preference and language, not solely because of accessibility
- African Americans and Hispanics seeing physicians of their same race or ethnicity report more partnership, satisfaction and receipt of needed care

Gender and Communication

Women More Than Men...

- disclose more information about themselves
- have warmer, more engaged styles of nonverbal communication
- encourage others to talk to them more freely and in a warmer and more intimate way
- in the medical context, receive more information, ask more questions, and have more partnership-building with physicians

Can Women Physicians Help?

- Now nearly 50% of medical students are women
- engage in more psychosocial and emotional conversation, partnership building and have longer visits with patients than male physicians
- are rated by patients as more participatory in their decision-making styles
- Women report more trust and satisfaction when seeing women physicians
- Women physicians prescribe higher doses of pain medication to minority patients than to white patients

What we know

- Race and gender disparities exist in technical quality of health care received by patients
- Disparities in interpersonal quality are more pronounced across race lines than gender lines
- Minority physicians and women physicians may provide better interpersonal care to patients
- Increasing ethnic and gender diversity among health professionals will improve patients' health care experiences

What can African American women do?

- Become more educated and informed patients
- Ask health professionals more questions, disclose your concerns and preferences
- Ask for support to achieve your health behavior goals from your physician, family, and friends
- Whenever possible, seek health professionals who provide care for you -- not just your medical condition

Strategies to improve the quality of patient-provider relationships

- Patient education, activation, and empowerment
- Communication and cultural sensitivity training for health professionals
- Increase ethnic and racial diversity among health professionals

Institute of Medicine

Committee on Understanding and Eliminating Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care, 2002

- Implement patient education programs to increase patients' knowledge of how to access care and participate in treatment decisions
- Integrate cross-cultural education into training of all health professionals
- Increase the proportion of underrepresented U.S. racial and ethnic minorities among health professionals