

The Lack of Representation of African American and Hispanic doctors in the U.S.

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Introduction

Throughout history, African Americans and Hispanics have been underrepresented in the medical field and even more in academics. Why is that? What is causing the ethnic gap between minority patients and their providers? According to Harvard Business Review, "As of active doctors in 2013 52.6% of physicians are White while only 5% are African American and 5.8% are Hispanic/ Latinx". Adversities in educational systems, hospital efficiency, implied racism in medical practices, as well as trust and a sense of community in a healthcare facility are factors that contribute to this nationwide decline in diversity.

Research Question:

How does the underrepresentation of healthcare professionals of color in the United States impact the health outcomes and experiences of minority patients?

Thesis Statement:

The nationwide underrepresentation of doctors of color in hospitals is an issue that needs attention because it puts minority patients at higher health risk.

Methodology:

The information for the project "The Underrepresentation of African American and Hispanic Doctors across the U.S." was accumulated through quantitative data as well as secondary peer-reviewed scholarly sources such as ScienceDirect, Association of American Medical Colleges, the National Library of Medicine, Penn Medicine, Duke University, Oxford Review, and Google Scholar.

Approaching this topic with the background and rooting the focus on why this issue is occurring was the key to seeing how bias begins. Qualitative data was the most effective way to compare and contrast the statistical difference for Hispanic and Black physicians and for their White counterparts. In the graphs there is qualitative data of quantitative responses to better showcase the effects on the patients.

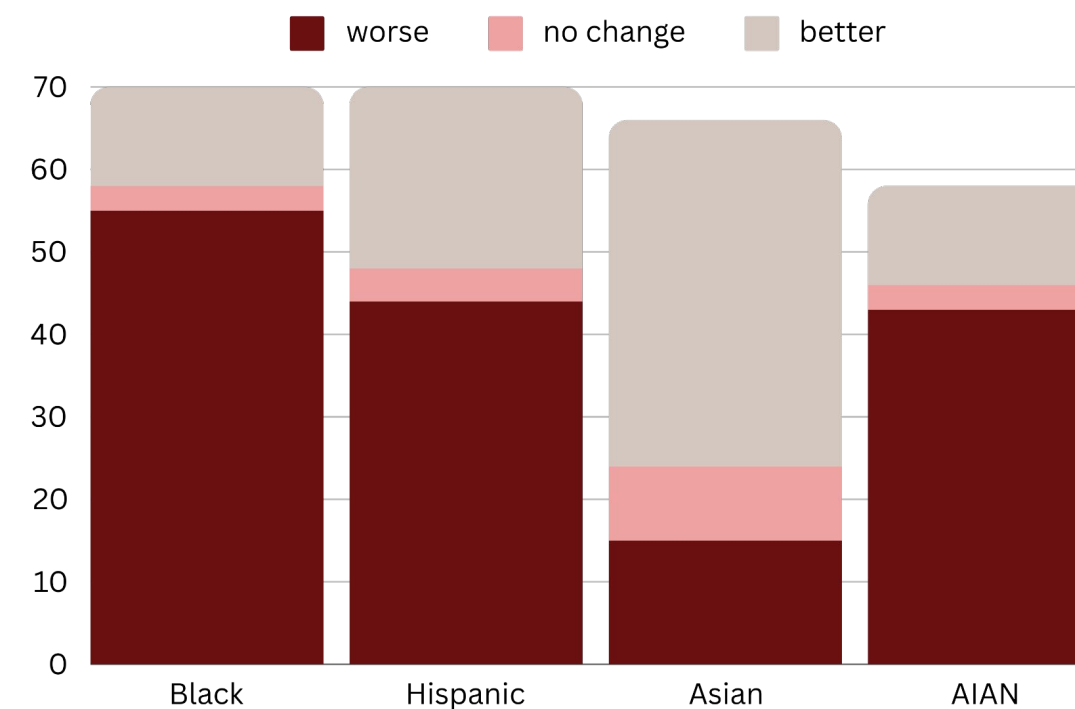
Background

Hospitals all around the U.S. have struggled to have representation of African American and Hispanic physicians. These diversities in places of healthcare or lack of them can be crucial to accurate care as well as positive experiences for minority patients of similar ethnic backgrounds. As described by the National Library of Medicine, race-conscious professionalism is the "dual obligation encountered by many minority physicians not only to pursue excellence in their field but also to leverage their professional stature to improve the well-being of their communities". This re-emphasizes that doctors of color feel that they have an obligation to raise the ethical condition of treatment to those of similar backgrounds.

Many educational barriers facilitate systematic disparities against Black scholars, often keeping them from receiving their doctorate. The Association of American Medical Colleges brings attention to the mentors within residency programs almost always have some implicit biases that are often internalized by their prodigies as the cycle repeats. A workshop was made by Duke University School of Medicine Academy for educators and academic development in 2021 to help educators be aware of their unconscious biases and how they could affect a patient's outcomes or education. Implicit bias is defined as a negative attitude that someone is not consciously aware of toward an individual or group of people. This can be a determinant of how attentive a healthcare provider is when communicating with patients and offering treatment plans. Communication and trust are other big factors in patient-provider relationships. Patients feel more comfortable voicing their concerns, asking questions, and making annual visits when they feel heard and culturally understood by their healthcare providers.

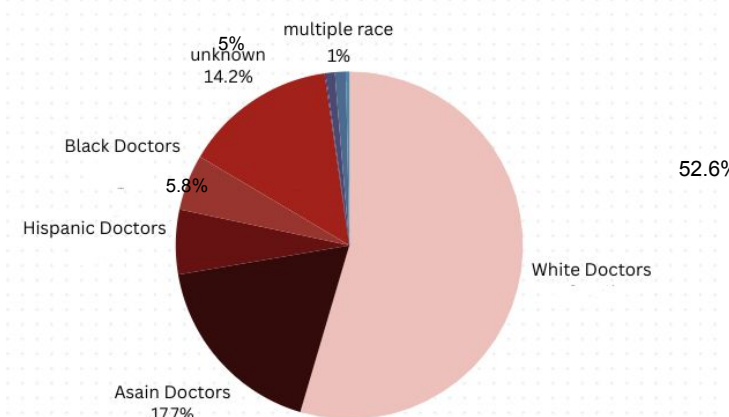
Data Analysis

Health and Healthcare among people of color compared to White people



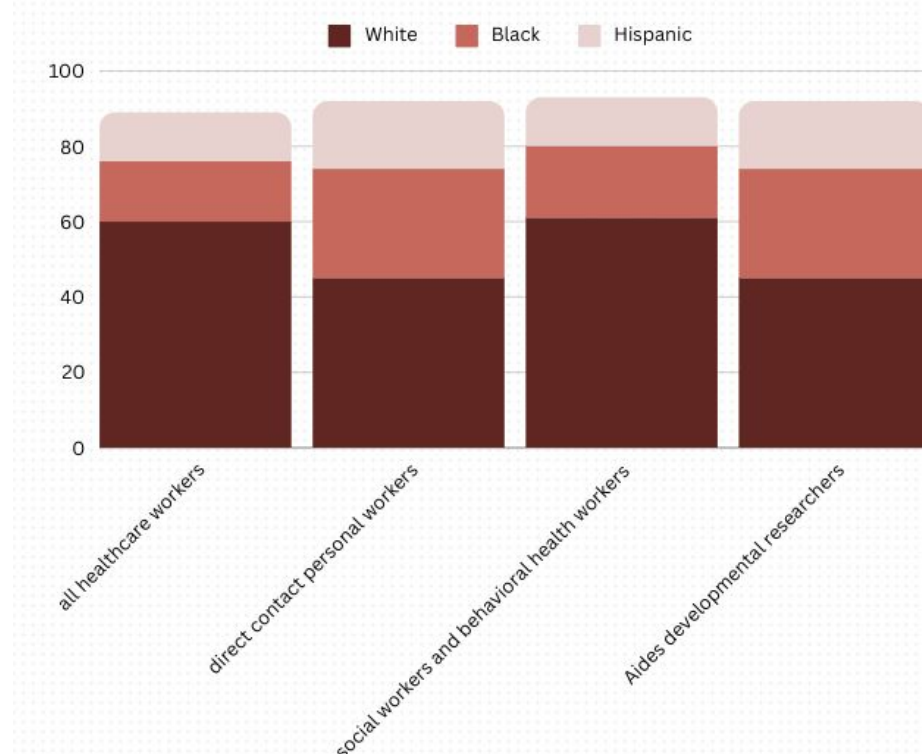
This graph is from International myeloma foundation shows White doctors comprise 56.2% of the total population of physicians in the US black and Hispanics are the made up of over half of experiences being worse in hospitals.

Demographic of physicians race/ethnicity in 2018



This graph comprises information from Birmingham Watch, it shows the ethnicity of active physicians in 2018. Compare and contrast to those who have had negative experiences at the doctor's office, there is an over representation of White physicians in the workplace as well as overrepresentation of dissatisfaction of minority patients.

Racial/Ethnic Distribution of Health Care workers by Occupation in 2019



This graph from Kaiser family foundation shows the representation of Hispanic and African American healthcare providers compared to the percentage of white physicians

Results

Demographics of Doctor-

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, less than 30% of healthcare providers are African American, and less than 20% are Hispanic, compared to nearly 70% of White physicians. The third graph shows how there is an underrepresentation of Hispanic and African American doctors despite the overrepresentation of minority patients. This poses an alarming statistic for African American patients with only 1 Black doctor for every 121 Black patients, and 1 Hispanic doctor for every 173 Hispanic patients, among those surveyed. This disparity makes it challenging for minority patients to find doctors who understand their unique struggles and conditions. For instance, Junko Takeshita, an Asian doctor in Philadelphia, shared her experience with Penn Medicine. She had limited experience with Black patients and worked at a dermatology practice with no Black doctors. When she prescribed a medicated shampoo for scalp psoriasis to her first Black patient, it didn't work because the patient couldn't use it daily due to her hair texture. Unfortunately the prescribed shampoo prevented her from achieving the benefits needed to improve her skin condition.

Effects on patients-

Statistics also show that Hispanic and Black patients often have a negative experience when seeking healthcare more than any other ethnic group. 52.6% of all healthcare providers are white and many of these unsatisfactory visits are due to patients and healthcare professionals having race discordant interactions. With 55/70 Black patients and 44/70 Hispanic patients reporting 'worse' experiences at the doctor's office than their White counterparts, many report adversities such as language barriers and dismissal of pain along with other symptoms. For example, according to Stanford University School of Medicine a study was conducted for 1300 black men in Oakland, California who were surveyed then given a free physician consultation and health screening. The Black men who were assigned a Black doctor were reported to be significantly more likely to be open about specific health concerns and recent history than ones that were provided white doctors.

Conclusion

The lack of African American and Hispanic physicians is a critical issue in the United States that is deteriorating the health of many minority patients and is still affecting many communities today. More diverse doctors is a possible solution to better patient-provider trust. Patients feel more comfortable voicing their concerns, asking questions, and making annual visits when they feel not only heard but culturally understood by their healthcare providers. This starts at the education level, by being more aware of our own implicit biases and practicing equity in health facilities will encourage many young minority students to want to pursue academics and improve the quality of health in their communities.

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