Bias in Pain Treatment

Across the lifespan and regardless of socioeconomic status, blacks are less likely than whites to receive analgesic medication for pain.\(^1\-^3\)

Primary care providers are more likely to underestimate pain intensity in blacks than in other sociodemographic groups.\(^2\,^4\)

Compared with white patients, black patients were more likely to have:

- more referrals for substance abuse assessment
- fewer referrals to a pain specialist
- increased drug urine tests

Socioeconomic Status

People with incomes below poverty level are more likely to report pain.\(^1\,^3\)

During ER visits, opioids were prescribed more frequently to patients with the highest socioeconomic status.\(^3\)

Language Barriers

Less than 20% of health professionals treating Hispanic pain patients reported Spanish proficiency at an advanced level.\(^7\)

Access to Care

Pharmacies located in minority neighborhoods are less likely to carry sufficient prescription analgesics than those located in white neighborhoods.\(^6\)

Impoverished individuals and minorities are more likely to be uninsured or underinsured than non-minorities and people with greater incomes.\(^2\)

Reduced access to health care in general, and specialty care in particular, contributes to pain disparities, with racial and ethnic minorities and the poor having decreased access to care.\(^6\)

Learn More...

The above information points to a need for a multidisciplinary approach to pain care and treatment including clinicians’ awareness of implicit bias. An IOM report on relieving pain in America (see references) called for a comprehensive population health-level strategy for pain, which is currently in progress under the Dept. of Health and Human Services.

Resources for persons with pain:
- Find a doctor
- Talking with your doctor
  - [http://www.nih.gov/communication/talktousourdoktor.htm](http://www.nih.gov/communication/talktousourdoktor.htm)
- Learn more about chronic pain

Resources for care providers:
- Cultural & linguistic competency
  - [http://www.hrsa.gov/publichealth/healthliteracy/](http://www.hrsa.gov/publichealth/healthliteracy/)
  - [http://www.nih.gov/communication/culturalcompetency.htm](http://www.nih.gov/communication/culturalcompetency.htm)
- Office of Minority Health – Cultural & Linguistic Competency

References