

Challenges for Improving the Health of Persons of Color: An Introduction to this Special Issue

by
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Many obstacles to the access to proper health care services have been recognized and identified for persons of African descent. The primary barriers include but are not limited to the inability to pay for health care services, the lack of transportation to a health facility, inadequate child care, the lack of a clear health care treatment plan, and the failure to incorporate a prescribed health plan into one's daily life. In addition, African Americans' cultural belief system and health practices have an enormous impact upon their well-being despite of their income and education levels. As a result, these health beliefs and practices have ultimately effected the utilization of many current health care services and delivery systems when the other barriers have been eliminated.

Even more puzzling is the health of thousands of African American families continue to be worsen even with the upward mobility of persons of color into “mainstream” American society, despite and with the incredible advances in medicines as well as medical technology. More specifically, preventable diseases such as a cancer, hypertension, and diabetes has continued to escalate in the African American adult population at much more an alarming rate in comparison to non-African American groups.

According to 1990 and 1991 statistics from the United States Department of Health and Human Services, African Americans also are approximately 1.3 times as likely to die from cancer than Whites, 1.5 times likely to die from heart disease, 2 times as likely to die from a stroke, and 2.5 times likely to die from complications of diabetes. Infant mortality as well as both unintentional and intentional injury deaths also are major contributions to excessive death among African American children and youth. Some of the most striking statistics from the National Center for Health note that Black American infants die at twice the rate of White infants from causes such as low birth weight. Also African American children die at 1.5 times the rate of White children from unintentional injuries and Black American male adolescents and young adults die at 7 times the rate of their white cohorts from homicide. (Services 1985) (Services, Healthy People 2000: National Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Ojectives 1990)

The reasons for these and many other health disparities between African Americans and non-African Americans are multifaceted and complex. A disproportionate number of Black Americans lack financial access to the health care system. According to a 1990 report from the United States General Accounting Office, African American are more than 2.5 times a likely to be uninsured than Whites, twenty percent of Black American have no access to primary health care providers. (Services, Healthy People 2000: National Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Ojectives 1990) (Office 1991)One hopes that the enactment of the 2010 Affordable Health Care Act will change some of these dreadful statistics.

This special edition of *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, a peer reviewed international publication, explores various topics and health concerns linked to the healthcare and public health of persons of African descent. The essays contained in this volume examines a variety topics that range, from Alzheimer’s Disease Caregivers to Racial Disparities in the field of Autoimmune Disease Research to how to access to the field of mental health of persons of African descent in the United States to the various racial disparities with the dental care industry. More specifically, Cassandra Chaney, Scott E. Wilks, Jen Geiger, and August Boyd’s discuss the topic of Alzheimer in great detail, while Halima Moncrieffe explores the complex field of Autoimmune disease with great precision and care. Furthermore, while Edward Wallace discusses racial and ethnic disparities in the dental care industry, co-editor Jacqueline Smith, Vanessa Hunn, Dana Harley, Willie Elliott, and James P. Canfield analyze the cultural competency of the field of mental health.

The last piece in this volume is a book review on the field of public health. Throughout this edition, each author makes a powerful contribution to the fields of healthcare and public health. But, perhaps more importantly, each essay in this volume demonstrates that more research is greatly needed in a variety of areas when it comes to the topic of African American health and the responses of the healthcare industry to the needs of people of color.

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