Addressing Social Determinants of Health: Specifying Race and Racism

In order to have the greatest possible impact on individual and population health, it is essential that we recognize the social determinants of health including class, education, housing and stigma when we practice and teach about health and illness. Though research has consistently documented disparities between ethnic and racial groups, we have not yet acknowledged the role race and racism play in driving these disparities. By naming racism specifically as a root cause of health disparities, we as health professionals can address this gap in medical practice and education.

Factors that Affect Health

Smallest Impact
- “Use condoms”, “eat healthy”, “be physically active”
- Rx for high blood pressure, diabetes, depression, asthma
- Immunizations, addiction treatment, eliminate copay for preventive care
- Fluoridation, smoke-free laws, food stamps at farmers’ markets
- Fair-wage jobs, universal pre-K

Largest Impact
- Counseling & Education
- Clinical Interventions
- Long-Lasting Protective Interventions
- Changing the Context to support individuals’ healthy decisions
- Socioeconomic Factors: Class, race, stigma, education, housing, environment

Tips for addressing race and racism in our precepting and education of learners

- Make racism and health disparities part of the explicit curriculum
- Become more self aware: model self-reflection; examine your own attitudes, language, patterns and practices; encourage learners’ self-reflection
- Pay attention to population-based health outcome data by race: explore how racism contributes to the data (www.countyhealthrankings.org)
- Emphasize the social determinants of health: challenge learners to address racism, class and education in their patient presentations
- Engage in public advocacy and activism: listen to the community’s perspectives and solutions; develop partnerships with community agencies; use your voice as health professionals to support policies that promote equity; help learners to become patient advocates and change agents; lead by example

If we fail to explicitly examine our policies and fail to engage our staff in discussions of racism and health...we may unintentionally bolster the status quo even as society is calling for reform.

- Mary Bassett, MD, MPH
New York City Health Commissioner

References / Resources:

Bedell J. Back to the Future: Community Oriented Primary Care and Place-based Strategies for Health. Eighth Annual Harold Wise MD Memorial Lecture, 5/12/15, Montefiore Medical Center


www.countyhealthrankings.org

Teaching Tips is a monthly e-newsletter for Faculty, Residents, and Community Preceptors sponsored by the DFSM Faculty Development Fellowship at Montefiore Medical Center. Teaching Tips will include practical teaching techniques for busy physicians who want to enhance teaching and learning at their clinical practices. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for future topics please contact Ellen Tattelman (etattelman@montefiore.org) or Zoon Naqvi (zoon.naqvi@einstein.yu.edu).