Achieving Health Equity

naming and addressing racism as a threat to the health and well-being of the nation

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National Academy of Medicine

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Levels of health intervention
Jones CP et al. *J Health Care Poor Underserved* 2009.
Jones CP et al. *J Health Care Poor Underserved* 2009.
Addressing the social determinants of health

Primary prevention

Safety net programs and secondary prevention

Medical care and tertiary prevention

Jones CP et al. *J Health Care Poor Underserved* 2009.
But how do disparities arise?

- Differences in the quality of care received within the health care system

- Differences in access to health care, including preventive and curative services

- Differences in life opportunities, exposures, and stresses that result in differences in underlying health status


Differences in access to care

Differences in exposures and opportunities

Differences in quality of care
(ambulance slow or goes the wrong way)

Addressing the social determinants of equity:

Why are there differences in resources along the cliff face?

Why are there differences in who is found at different parts of the cliff?

Jones CP et al. *J Health Care Poor Underserved* 2009.
3 dimensions of health intervention
3 dimensions of health intervention

Health services
3 dimensions of health intervention

*Health services*

*Addressing social determinants of health*
3 dimensions of health intervention

Health services

Addressing social determinants of health

Addressing social determinants of equity
What is racism?

A system

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Levels of Racism

- Institutionalized
- Personally-mediated
- Internalized

Institutionalized racism

- Differential access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society, by “race”

- Examples
  - Housing, education, employment, income
  - Medical facilities
  - Clean environment
  - Information, resources, voice

- Explains the association between social class and “race”

Personally-mediated racism

- Differential assumptions about the abilities, motives, and intents of others, by “race”
- Differential actions based on those assumptions
- Prejudice and discrimination
- Examples
  - Police brutality
  - Physician disrespect
  - Shopkeeper vigilance
  - Waiter indifference
  - Teacher devaluation

Internalized racism

- Acceptance by the stigmatized “races” of negative messages about our own abilities and intrinsic worth

- Examples
  - Self-devaluation
  - White man’s ice is colder
  - Resignation, helplessness, hopelessness

- Accepting limitations to our full humanity

Levels of Racism: A Gardener’s Tale

Who is the gardener?

- Power to decide
- Power to act
- Control of resources

- Dangerous when
  - Allied with one group
  - Not concerned with equity

What is [inequity]?

A system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on [fill in the blank]

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Many axes of inequity

- “Race”
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Labor roles and social class markers
- Nationality, language, and legal status
- Sexual orientation
- Disability status
- Geography
- Religion
- Incarceration history

These are risk MARKERS
What is health equity?

- “Health equity” is assurance of the conditions for optimal health for all people

- Achieving health equity requires
  - Valuing all individuals and populations equally
  - Recognizing and rectifying historical injustices
  - Providing resources according to need

- Health disparities will be eliminated when health equity is achieved

Jones CP. Systems of Power, Axes of Inequity: Parallels, Intersections, Braiding the Strands. *Medical Care*
2014;52(10)Suppl 3:S71-S75.
Our tasks

- **Put racism on the agenda**
  - Name racism as a force determining the other social determinants of health
  - Routinely monitor for differential exposures and opportunities (as well as outcomes) by “race”
Our tasks

- Ask, “How is racism operating here?”
  - Identify mechanisms in structures, policies, practices, norms, and values
  - Attend to both what exists and what is lacking
Our tasks

- Organize and strategize to act
  - Join in grassroots organizing around the conditions of people’s lives
  - Identify the structural factors creating and perpetuating those conditions
  - Link with similar efforts across the country and around the world
Community-oriented primary care (COPC)

- Health center assumes responsibility for health and well-being of geographically-defined community
- Respectful, engaged interaction between health center and community
- Hiring, training, and deployment of community health workers
Benefits of COPC

- Geographically-defined
- Community as key actor
- Provides training and employment

- Marriage of clinical medicine and public health
- Addresses unmet and unrecognized need
- Addresses social determinants of health and equity
Brief COPC timeline

- Sidney and Emily Kark (1940s, South Africa)
- Jack Geiger, John Hatch, and Count Gibson (1960s, Mississippi and Massachusetts)
- Community Health Center movement in the US
- Institute of Medicine report, 1983
- Health Resources and Services Administration report, 1987
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Proposed
APHA Racism or Health Collaborative

- Communication and Dissemination
- Education and Development
- Global Matters
- Liaison and Partnership
- Organizational Excellence
- Policy and Legislation
- Science and Publications
Barriers to achieving health equity

- **A-historical culture**
  - The present as disconnected from the past
  - Current distribution of advantage/disadvantage as happenstance
  - Systems and structures as givens and immutable

- **Narrow focus on the individual**
  - Self-interest narrowly defined
  - Limited sense of interdependence
  - Limited sense of collective efficacy
  - Systems and structures as invisible or irrelevant

- **“Myth of meritocracy”**
  - Role of hard work
  - Denial of racism
  - Two babies: Equal potential or equal opportunity?
Strategies for achieving health equity

- **To change opportunity structures**
  - Understand the importance of history
  - Challenge the narrow focus on the individual
  - Expose the “myth of meritocracy”
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- **To value all people equally**
  - Break out of bubbles to experience our common humanity
  - Embrace ALL children as OUR children
ICERD

- *International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination*
  
  International anti-racism treaty adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1965
  
  [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CERD.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CERD.aspx)

- US signed in 1966
- US ratified in 1994
Current status

- 3rd US report submitted to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in 2013

- 82 parallel reports submitted by civil society organizations

- CERD considered at its 85th session (13-14 Aug 2014)
CERD Concluding Observations

- 14-page document (25 Sep 2014) available online

- Concerns and recommendations
  - Racial profiling (paras 8 and 18)
  - Residential segregation (para 13)
  - Achievement gap in education (para 14)
  - Differential access to health care (para 15)
  - Disproportionate incarceration (para 20)
CERD Concluding Observations


- Concerns and recommendations
  - “The Committee recommends that the State party increase its efforts to raise public awareness and knowledge of the Convention throughout its territory” (para 32)
  - “The Committee recommends that the State party adopt a national action plan to combat structural racial discrimination” (para 25)
I looked up and noticed a sign . . .
Racism structures "Open/Closed" signs in our society.
It is difficult to recognize systems of inequity that privilege us.

Those on the outside are very aware of the two-sided nature of the sign.
Is there really a two-sided sign?

Hard to know, when only see “Open”. A privilege not to HAVE to know. Once DO know, can choose to act.
Japanese Lanterns: Colored perceptions
The colors we think we see are due to the lights by which we look. These colored lights distort and mask our true variability.
What is “race”?

A social classification, not a biological descriptor. The social interpretation of how one looks in a “race”-conscious society.
Racism is most often passive
1. Name racism
2. Ask “How is racism operating here?”
3. Organize and strategize to act
Japanese Lanterns: Colored perceptions
Dual Reality: A restaurant saga
Life on a Conveyor Belt: Moving to action
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