CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH ON RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES IN HEALTH AND HEALTHCARE

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What is a Health Disparity?

- Although “disparity” is widely used in public health in US, there is difference of opinion about what is meant.
- Differing opinions are based on dictionary definitions as well as personal beliefs of what is avoidable and what is unfair.
- Disparity acts as a signpost—indicating that something is wrong.

Health Care Disparities

- Disparities exist across all dimensions of access & quality of health care, many clinical conditions, & many subpopulations
- Poor and Hispanics face increased disparities in access to care.
Many routes from epidemiologic activity to policy formation...

- Surveillance raises awareness of issue
- Measurement research progressively refines exposure and outcomes
- Etiologic research identifies causal relations to natural settings
- Intervention research pilots potential actions
- Evaluation research considers impacts of policies

Examples of How Epidemiologists Have Impacted on Policies to Reduce/Eliminate Health Disparities

- **Asthma**—housing interventions
- **Data development**—health equity index
- **Diet/Nutrition**—moratorium on fast food restaurants
- **Health Workforce**—diverse workforce
- **HIV/AIDS**—reduction of black/white gap in gonorrhea from 60:1 to 20:1
- **Child & Adult Immunizations**—closing of gaps in childhood immunization coverage
FOUR GENERATIONS OF HEALTH DISPARITIES RESEARCH?

HOT TOPICS

- Genetics & Molecular Epidemiology
- Hispanic Paradox
- Interest in Health Care Disparities & Quality Chasm
- Measures of racism and discrimination, & literacy
- Policy changes to limit access to care
- Persons with disabilities
- Interdisciplinary, CBPR, Qualitative & Mixed Methods
- Translational research
Alternatives to Clinical Trials

- Meta-Analysis
- Outcomes research
- Post-marketing surveillance
- Analysis of large, automated, multipurpose databases of patient information collected by health maintenance organizations
- Comparative effectiveness studies
Why do Healthcare Disparities Occur?

- Time pressure, cognitive complexity, and pressures for cost-containment
- Financial and institutional arrangements of health systems, as well as the legal, regulatory, and policy environment in which they operate
- Access barriers (language, geography, and cultural familiarity)
- Stereotyping, biases, and uncertainty on the part of healthcare provider

Common research questions in health literacy and cultural competency

- How can we link training to improved health outcomes using universal cross-cutting approach to improve culturally competent care delivery that also addresses limited health literacy?
- Can communication training focused on understanding in underserved populations enhance patient comprehension & change behavior?

Common research questions--II

- Do programs that aim to change attitudes have different impact than programs that focus primarily on behavior change?
- What are “best practices” in health literacy and cultural competency training?
- What are effective teaching methods?
- What faculty development is necessary?

Common Research Questions--III

- How can we include community stakeholders for health professional training?
- What is the added value of using patients as teaching partners?

FIGURE 1. Understanding policy processes.

Place high priority on one specific issue

Tell a story using epidemiologic or other data

Develop a strong, evolving and probably long-term multidisciplinary team approach

Reach consensus with stakeholders around the importance of this change, which may broaden and change over time.

Consider the political and social environments

Recognize that the strategy for implementing policy change is situational and iterative
What Can You Do?

AT LEAST:
- Join groups that include advocacy
- Register to vote, ask questions and hold politicians accountable.
- Identify easy to search websites and listservs
- Participate in community outreach programs

MORE:
- Encourage students to register to vote and to vote.
- Get formal training about lobbying and being a resource to elected officials
- Find mentors who care about these issues
- Get formal training in “Motivational Interviewing” & “Teach Back”