

Pfizer Survey Points to Complexities in Eliminating Structural Racism in Health Care

Pfizer stands with its multicultural partners in working toward health equity by overcoming barriers to health care access and upending structural racism in the health care system. In 2020, through its Multicultural Health Equity Collective, a Pfizer team dedicated to working in partnership with key influencer groups to eliminate health disparities, Pfizer launched a survey on systemic racism in health care at the National Hispanic Medical Association (NHMA) regional meetings in Washington, DC, and Miami. The brief survey explored personal experiences of NHMA members, their opinions on where ending racism in the health care system could have the most impact on patient care, where the pharmaceutical industry should focus their diversity and inclusion efforts, and how to disrupt systemic racism in health care.

While the survey of health care providers is not yet complete and is inconclusive at this time, initial feedback from NHMA members has been illuminating. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of respondents from Washington, DC, said they had experienced racially charged actions during their careers, while in Miami, 93% stated the same, pointing to some possible regional differences. Similarly, 78% of survey respondents from Washington, DC, said they had witnessed racially charged actions or discrimination against patients seeking or receiving care in a health institution, while 88% of respondents from Miami said they had witnessed similar actions.

Discrimination is considered a factor that influences individual health outcomes within the widely accepted framework by the Kaiser Family Foundation to help understand the Social Determinants of Health. (See figure below.)¹ In this paradigm, discrimination is considered within the Community and Social Context along with other factors such as social integration, community support systems, community engagement, and stress. While this has widely been known and accepted as a factor in health care, there is no clear way to address and solve the problem.

¹Artiga S, Hinton, E. Beyond health care: the role of social determinants in promoting health and health equity. Kaiser Family Foundation, Published May 10, 2018. <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/beyond-health-care-the-role-of-social-determinants-in-promoting-health-and-health-equity/>, Accessed May 1, 2021.

Social Determinants of Health

Economic Stability	Neighborhood and Physical Environment	Education	Food	Community and Social Context	Health Care System
Employment	Housing	Literacy	Hunger	Social integration	Health coverage
Income	Transportation	Language	Access to healthy options	Support systems	Provider availability
Expenses	Safety	Early childhood education		Community engagement	Provider linguistic and cultural competency
Debt	Parks	Vocational training		Discrimination	Quality of care
Medical bills	Playgrounds	Higher education		Stress	
Support	Walkability				
	Zip code / geography				
Health Outcomes Mortality, Morbidity, Life Expectancy, Health Care Expenditures, Health Status, Functional Limitations					



NHMA respondents to the question of where ending racism would make the most impact on patient care in the short term - 37% in Washington, DC, and 25% in Miami - pointed to starting with health care facilities/hospitals. Yet, 33% of respondents from Miami said the focus should be on public health insurance. Other areas highlighted as potentially impactful were public policy/financing and the health care workforce.

Ideas for disrupting systemic racism in health care offered another glimpse into the realm of complex issues and possibilities for solutions. From offering widespread unconscious bias, cultural sensitivity, and cultural competency training to changing curriculums in medical schools, opening doors to job opportunities for diverse professionals, influencing legislation, and taking personal responsibility to advocate within individual organizations and institutions, the vastness of the system was apparent. While the problem is complex requiring many different solutions to various aspects of the issue, it is essential that we begin to tackle it.

Pfizer was proud to launch this inquiry with NHMA and has conducted similar surveys with the National Association of Hispanic Nurses and the National Black Nurses Association. It plans to conclude the study with a final survey with the National Medical Association before compiling final results. "The feedback from the survey will help us determine a future direction for how to best engage with our partners and join together for action on the issues," said Niesha Foster, Vice President, Global Health and Product Access, Pfizer Inc.

If you would like to learn more about this project, please contact Roy Cosme, president of Arcos Communications, via email at rcosme@arcos-ny.com.