

EDUCATOR RESOURCES



Mistrust in the Health Care System Among Black and African American Communities

Multiple studies have shown that Blacks and African Americans report lower levels of trust in hospitals and health care providers than whites^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5}. This mistrust may influence a patient's experience and satisfaction with the medical care they receive. Mistrust can also reduce the likelihood that a patient will seek medical screenings or follow up with recommended treatments^{3, 5}. It is important to understand the reasons many Blacks and African Americans feel less trusting of health care providers, and what you can do to help ease concerns about seeking health care.

Reasons for Distrust in Health Care Providers

Many studies cite the *Tuskegee Syphilis Study* as a major cause of African Americans' mistrust in the health care system. However, other factors that reduce trust include the following^{2, 3}:

- Experiences and expectations of racism and discrimination
- Having received substandard care in the past
- Concerns about being used for experiments without their knowledge
- Concerns about privacy
- A general mistrust of large, societal institutions, such as social and health service providers

Impact of Reduced Trust in the Medical System

Mistrust in the health care system among African Americans has been cited as a major reason for lower levels of patient satisfaction with care and decreased participation in health promotion activities and medical research^{4, 7}. This is of particular concern because some people have reported that distrust in the health care system has led them to forgo recommended treatments (including surgery), withdraw from care or not seek care in the first place³, all of which can have a negative impact on their long-term health outcomes⁸. Also, Black and African American women are not well-represented in clinical trials for any disease, which is partially a result of lower trust. Lack of participation in these studies limits how much we know about this population and which treatments, for example, would be most beneficial to them based on different biological factors^{9, 10}.



For more information, see the [*Tuskegee Syphilis Study*](#).



For more information about barriers to health care access among Black immigrant populations, see [*Health Care Perceptions and Barriers to Access Among Black Immigrant Populations*](#).



For more information about Black and African American participation in clinical trials, see [*Talking to Your Audience About Clinical Trials*](#).

Overcoming Mistrust in the Medical System

It is important for you to understand that mistrust in the medical system may be a barrier for some members of your audience. Mistrust may keep them from seeking and obtaining a clinical breast exam or mammogram, or following up after an abnormal screening.

Providing information about the importance of regular medical visits and use of mammograms for breast cancer screening has been a successful approach to improve breast health outcomes among African American women¹¹.

Below are some tips for addressing mistrust and fear within your audience:

- If an audience member expresses concerns about seeking health care due to a lack of trust, you can ask that person to share a little about her or his experience. This may help you to provide appropriate information or recommendations.
- Provide some information about what to expect during a clinical breast exam or mammogram. This information may help your audience avoid unexpected surprises and feel more comfortable about the process of being screened. Discuss questions that a physician or technician may ask during the screening process.
- Share some resources that your audience members can use to prepare for a visit, including [Questions to Ask Your Doctor - Screening Mammograms card](#).
- Encourage audience members to take an active role in their health care. This can include:
 - Talking to their doctor when they're due for or missed a screening. Doctors do not always remind patients when they need a screening that is not a part of the services that office or doctor provides.
 - Writing down information before an appointment. This may include any questions or concerns they may have, or other information that they wish to share with their health care provider. This will help them to remember details and questions that we all sometimes forget during medical appointments.
 - Asking questions to help them better understand what their doctor discusses during an appointment. Questions might include:
 - What is the problem or condition I am facing?
 - What do I need to do next?
 - Why is this important?
 - Speaking up if they feel like their doctor did not understand or hear them.
- If someone tells you they do not like or trust their health care provider, you may suggest that she or he seek a new one. A poor relationship with a health care provider may prevent someone from getting breast cancer screenings. Ways of finding a new provider include the following:
 - Getting suggestions from family members and friends who are satisfied with the care they receive
 - Calling the insurance company or searching for a provider online through their insurance company's website
 - Searching websites with patient satisfaction ratings

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