

Enabling Healthcare Providers to Use a Patient-Centered Approach to Educating Patients about the COVID-19 Vaccine in Medically Underserved and Rural Communities in South Carolina

Black Americans' Distrust of Medical Treatment in the United States

The medical system in the United States has not always treated everyone fairly in the past and has at times discriminated against and targeted Black Americans. Below are events that have occurred in history that have contributed to the distrust of Black Americans in the US. This information is provided to increase awareness of these concerns as well as to provide resources for deeper exploration of these issues when engaging in conversations with patients about distrust in the US medical system.

Unfair Medical Treatment

- *The US Public Health Services "Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male" was a 40-year study, beginning in 1932, and involved approximately 600 black men without their informed consent.*¹
- *Participants in the Tuskegee experiment were not told they were infected with syphilis. They had relationships with wives and girlfriends and many subsequently gave birth to children were with congenital syphilis.*
- *PCN was identified as the gold standard for treatment for Syphilis by 1947 but was withheld from participants and they were discouraged from seeking care elsewhere.*
- *Henrietta Lacks was a black woman who was diagnosed with cervical cancer and samples of her cancerous cells (HeLa) were taken during her treatment at Johns Hopkins and experimented on without her knowledge or consent.*²

Medical Education

- *Medical education in the 19th century relied on slaves as "anatomical material".*²
- *Some medical schools unearthed bodies of recently buried African Americans to use in anatomy labs.*

Unauthorized Medical Experiments

- *James Sims, the "father of US gynecology" experimented on female slaves in the 19th century forcing them to undergo experimental surgical procedures numerous times without anesthesia while other physicians observed and forced them to serve as nurses in his clinic.*^{2,3}
- *Minority women were overwhelmingly targeted for involuntary sterilization under early 20th century eugenics laws.*²

Medical Misconceptions

- *A 2016 study found that many white medical students wrongly believe that black people have a higher pain tolerance than white people.*⁴
- *White medical trainees believe myths such as Black people have thicker skin, less sensitive nerve endings, or stronger immune systems.*⁴

References:

1. <https://www.nber.org/digest/aug16/tuskegee-trust-doctors-and-health-black-men>
2. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)32032-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)32032-8/fulltext)
3. The medical ethics of Dr J Marion Sims: a fresh look at the historical record – (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2563360/>)
4. <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/how-we-fail-black-patients-pain>