

# ***Building Trust With Your African American Patients: Improving Diabetes Care***

***“African American respondents were found to be less likely [than white patients] to trust their physicians and hospitals...”<sup>1</sup>***

—William D. King, MD, JD, Department of Infectious Disease, School of Medicine, UCLA

## **The Issue of Trust**

African Americans represent the highest risk group in terms of diabetes prevalence and disease burden.<sup>2</sup> However, African American patients report significant mistrust of the health care system in America. Experts believe that regaining the trust of such minority patients is imperative to reducing health disparities.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Trust—a Critical Component of Medical Care<sup>3</sup>***

#### ***What does trust mean to a patient?***

Trust is the expectation that the medical provider will demonstrate that the patient's interests are a priority. It includes the perception of the provider's ability, interpersonal skills, and consideration of the patient's welfare.<sup>3</sup>

#### ***Why is trust so important?***

Trust is a key determinant of adherence to treatment and screenings; it also affects the length and quality of the patient-physician relationship.<sup>3</sup> Adherence to treatment is critical in the treatment of chronic conditions such as diabetes.

## **Understanding the Mistrust**

Reasons stated for mistrust of medical professionals typically include a patient's past negative experiences with individuals or institutions. For African Americans, in particular, it may also include discomfort with:

- ▶ A legacy of abuse (eg, experiments on slaves; the Tuskegee Syphilis Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Black Male)<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ Historical and current racism<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Sickle cell screening and discrimination<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ Concerns about privacy issues and harmful experimentation<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Health care disparities (health status is among the worst in the nation for African Americans)<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ Lack of access to care; lack of continuity with provider; limited physician access<sup>1,3</sup>
- ▶ Sources of care other than physician's office (main sources are often emergency departments and clinics, not a physician's office)<sup>3</sup>

These and other concerns lead to lower levels of trust, unwillingness to participate in clinical trials, and decreased adherence to treatment.

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## Working Toward Solutions

Gaining trust of patients can take time but is also a rewarding undertaking. You can start simply by<sup>6</sup>:

- ▶ Recognizing individuality
- ▶ Learning more about specific groups within each cultural community

The benefits include a better relationship with your patients, increased compliance, and improved health outcomes. Following are some tips that can help improve the trust of your African American patients and their compliance to a diabetes management plan.

### To Enhance Communications<sup>3</sup>

- ▶ **Improve** direct and empathetic communication skills
- ▶ **Build** partnerships with patients
- ▶ **Encourage** patients to talk more about their health conditions and express opinions
- ▶ **Ask** questions, then provide clear answers

### Special Cultural Considerations in your African American Patients<sup>2,7</sup>

- ▶ **Recognize** that spirituality is deeply embedded in the African American culture
- ▶ **Understand** the relationship of spirituality, health, and self-management of illness
- ▶ **Present** self-management of diabetes within a socio-cultural and family context
- ▶ **Encourage** and support family-centered and church-based approaches to diabetes care interventions

## Trust and Diabetes in Your African American Patients

Studies confirm that the impact of diabetes can be reduced through improvements in self-care behaviors that lead to glycemic control.<sup>2</sup> You can help enhance patient self-care by incorporating factors such as culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and psychosocial factors when explaining self-care behavior and outcomes.<sup>2</sup> For your African American patients, this includes consideration of the influences of spirituality, general life stress, multi-caregiving responsibilities, and the psychological impact of diabetes.<sup>2</sup>

Through improved cultural competence, clinicians can improve their relationships with patients and, consequently, improve compliance and outcomes in their African American patients with diabetes.

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