Minorities With HIV Fare Better With Culturally Competent Doctors

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The health outcomes of minorities receiving HIV care is generally dependent on the cultural competency of their physicians, according to new research from the Portland VA Medical Center and the Oregon Health & Science University, HealthDay reports. Publishing their findings in the Journal of General Internal Medicine, researchers studied 45 health care providers and 437 of their patients at four HIV clinics in Baltimore, Detroit, New York and Portland, Oregon.

Defining cultural competence as an amalgam of awareness, attitudes, behaviors and skills that aid in medical professionals' ability to provide care for diverse patient populations, the researchers asked the health care providers to rate their cultural competence. The investigators then assessed the patients' quality of care, based on whether or not they were taking antiretrovirals (ARVs), and on their level of adherence to the medications, their viral load and their ability to self-manage their regimen of meds.

As compared to those minority patients seeing providers in the bottom third of cultural competency, the minority patients treated by providers rated in the middle and top thirds of competency were more likely to be on ARVs, to adhere to the drugs and to be able to manage their condition better.

White patients were more likely to be on ARVs, to manage their medications and to have a suppressed viral load than non-whites treated by less culturally competent health professionals.

The study authors note in a release, "Our findings suggest that, through either training interventions or through efforts to diversify the health care workforce, increasing health care provider cultural competence holds the potential to reduce racial disparities in both the quality of health care, and the health of diverse patient populations."

To read the HealthDay story, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

To download a PDF of the release, click here.

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