Won’t Ask, Won’t Tell

Why are black doctors afraid to ask patients about their HIV status?

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Although many African-American doctors agree that HIV is a crisis in black communities, findings show that some of these same physicians avoid suggesting that their patients (many of them black folks, too) get tested for the virus. What’s stopping them? Primarily the social stigma that’s still connected with HIV.

After evaluating 502 surveys, researchers found that African-American doctors didn’t recommend an HIV test to their patients because they feared offending them, didn’t want to appear judgmental and felt their patients wouldn’t want to be pegged as people living with the virus.

Doctors gave other reasons too. For example, physicians said they didn’t have enough time and thought their patients had more urgent health needs. In other instances, patients couldn’t afford the tests or believed they were not at risk of the virus.

Study authors feel these findings show that doctors need to improve their ability to gather information about patients’ sexual histories during visits. More education and training could help doctors become more comfortable discussing these issues. Researchers hope that open dialogue and regular testing will help docs diagnose HIV-positive patients sooner and place them into care.

Indeed, doctors surveyed said that “physician recommendation” is the most common reason patients got tested for HIV.

Interestingly, less than half of the doctors polled reported that they’d taken HIV tests in the past five years. And 8 percent said they’d never been tested.

What did researchers think about these statistics? Some speculated that the doctors who felt it wasn’t important to get tested might decide the same for their patients.

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http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/HIV-testing-recommendation-24425-6956