Misdiagnosis Is Common for Black Dermatology Patients

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If you've ever had a skin problem misdiagnosed or dismissed by your dermatologist, you are not alone. For that reason, doctors at Chicago's Skin of Color Society are calling on care providers to implement changes in how they approach treatment for skin conditions on dark-complexioned patients, reports the Chicago Tribune.

According to the group, this shortfall in medical training for dermatologists occurs because doctors are still predominantly trained using visuals that illustrate skin problems on white patients. For Black people with skin conditions ranging from rashes to inflammation to dangerous skin cancers, this can result in health care inequities.
Skin conditions often present quite differently on different skin tones, causing doctors to misdiagnose or miss problems experienced by many patients of color.

"It's a different treatment plan, and it's a different discussion that needs to be had," said Jasmine Obioha, MD, a dermatologist at Cedars-Sinai who has been studying skin issues in Black patients for years.

Unrecognized or misdiagnosed issues can cause a patient humiliation or pain and may even be life-threatening. For example, one Black patient was diagnosed with age-related baldness instead of alopecia and another with ringworm instead of skin cancer.

The issue is gradually gaining more attention within the dermatology community. Obioha said that although she's been trained to study skin problems in patients of color in particular, many doctors lack this knowledge.

"You're trained to recognize these conditions on lighter skin," she commented. "If that's how it is for dermatology, you can only imagine how it is in primary care."

Doctors at the Skin of Color Society urge dermatologists and primary care providers across the

board to ask patients about their skin care routines and health regimens.

Those looking for a dermatologist with experience treating patients of color can utilize the American Academy of Dermatology Association's provider searching tool, which allows users to select skin of color as a practice focus to find a doctor.

To learn more about the state of skin health disparities in the United States and why specialized training is needed to educate doctors about differences between Black and white skin, see "Many Dermatologists Lack Medical Expertise in Treating Black People."

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