NIH Grant Will Fund Research Into Racial Disparities in Pain Care

Researchers hope to recommend better intervention strategies to medical schools to address racial bias and prejudice in pain care.

November 10, 2022 By Laura Schmidt

The National Institutes of Health awarded a five-year, $700,000 grant to Paige Lloyd, Phd, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Denver, and her team to study racial disparities in pain care and devise better intervention strategies to medical schools .

“Pain is a place where there’s a lot of subjectivity,” Lloyd said in a University of Denver news release. “And when you have subjectivity, that can be a ripe opportunity for biases like stereotypes, prejudice and empathy gaps to play a role.”

As primary investigator of the study, Lloyd and her team will first ask pain care providers to explain how they would treat hypothetical patients of different races, including multiracial patients, experiencing pain in order to identify any existing biases or disparities. “We know very little about how multiracial people are treated and the biases that they might be vulnerable to,” she said.

Another aspect of the study will examine medical students at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus in various simulated scenarios as they interact with patients of different races experiencing pain.

“We’re thinking about ways to expose them to patients, more variable patients, and working with them to try to individuate those patients,” she said. “So not just have them be a patient in and out of the door but spend some time sort of getting to know that patient and thinking about that patient critically. And we’re hoping that might be one step in the right direction.”

Lloyd will use the gathered data to better understand where biases exist and develop new intervention strategies to recommend to medical schools and medical professionals alike.

“The hope is that these conversations and opportunities for dissemination will reach relevant audiences but also that those audiences will provide advice and feedback to strengthen the work,” she said.

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