

Parkinsonism Worse for the Poor, Black and Not Well-Educated

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African-American patients and those with lower income and education levels suffer more severely and have greater disability from parkinsonism, according to a study in the online edition of [*Archives of Neurology*](#).

Parkinsonism is commonly found among older Americans. The condition, which is characterized by symptoms of slow movements, tremors and rigidity, is a neurological disorder similar to Parkinson's disease. In fact, "the most common cause of parkinsonism is Parkinson's disease, a debilitating, chronic, progressive neurodegenerative disorder with an incidence rate that increases with age," said study authors.

For the study, researchers at the University of Maryland in Baltimore surveyed 1,159 patients with parkinsonism who were evaluated by movement disorder specialists between 2003 and 2008. The questionnaires assessed study participants' demographics, disease severity, disability level and medication use history.

Researchers found African Americans had more severe parkinsonism and greater disability compared with white patients. In addition, scientists also linked lower income and education to greater disease severity and disability.

What's more, researchers also noted treatment disparities between blacks and whites. Data showed that 61.9 percent of African Americans were prescribed fewer medications to treat parkinsonism during their first doctor visit compared with 77.6 percent of whites. Furthermore, 20.6 percent of African Americans were prescribed newer medications to treat the condition compared with 41.1 percent of white patients. And docs prescribed antipsychotic meds for 12.7 percent of black patients compared with 6.1 percent of whites.

Because parkinsonism reduces quality of life, causes disability and leads to premature death, researchers suggested doctors needed to better understand the disease. That way, docs could find remedies for all patients with the disease, regardless of their socioeconomic background and financial status.

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