Black Children Less Likely to Get Painkillers in the ER

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This health disparity news hurts: According to a new findings published in JAMA Pediatrics, doctors in the United States are far less likely to administer pain meds to African-American children brought into the emergency room compared with white kids, NBC News reports.

For the study, researchers focused on cases of acute appendicitis, a notoriously painful health problem that doctors routinely treat with opioid painkillers. Scientists reviewed national survey data from 2003 to 2010 that evaluated the treatment received by more than 900,000 children diagnosed with the condition.

Findings showed only about 57 percent of all children got any painkiller in the emergency room after an appendicitis diagnosis, and only about 41 percent were prescribed the recommended opioid treatment. What's more, just 12 percent of black kids—far less than their white counterparts—ended up receiving an opioid drug for their pain.

Researchers noted that many doctors feared dispensing opioids to children, because of the potential for overdose or drug dependence. But the report stressed that it was more important to help kids control their pain during instances when it was severe, as in the case of acute appendicitis. In addition, there are several protocols in place to make sure kids don't overdose on pain meds or develop drug dependency.

"It is clear that despite broad recognition that controlling pain is a cornerstone of compassionate care, significant disparities remain in our approach to pain management among different populations," researchers wrote in the JAMA report.

Researchers said the results showing these types of disparities in the U.S. health care system aren't exactly surprising. That's because other findings reflect the same biases this study found.

Click here to find out more about how race can affect the quality of the medical treatment you receive.

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