

MEDIA REVIEWS

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BOOKS

Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Healthcare.

Brian D. Smedley, Adrienne Y. Stith, and Alan R. Nelson (Eds.). Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2003, 764 pages, \$44.95 (with appendixes on CD-ROM) or \$79.95 (complete text with printed appendixes).

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The purpose of *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Healthcare* is to provide an in-depth discussion of the issues and recommendations related to addressing and ultimately reducing racial and ethnic disparities in health care. The disparities in health status between majority and racial and ethnic minority populations have been well documented over time. However, in recent years, increasing evidence shows that racial and ethnic minorities receive a lower quality of health care when compared to nonminorities.

Given the ongoing disparities in health care, in 1999, Congress requested that the Institute of Medicine critically examine the type and extent of the differences in the quality of health care received by U.S. racial and ethnic minorities and nonminorities. A panel of 15 experts was charged to examine more than the commonly reported factor of access to care (e.g., insurance status, ability to pay for care) and more fully evaluate the possible role of less frequently reported factors such as discrimination, patient stereotyping, and bias in promoting healthcare disparities. Panel members, including academics, medi-

cal professionals, and researchers, conducted a series of workshops, focus groups, and hearings; performed an extensive review of the literature; and commissioned a series of papers by experts to gain further insight regarding the issue of unequal treatment in health care. The committee defined healthcare disparities as racial or ethnic differences in healthcare quality that do not result from access-related factors or clinical needs, preferences, and appropriateness of the intervention.

The text begins with an overview of committee activities, assumptions, and recommendations. This is followed by an extensive literature review on healthcare disparities as well as the healthcare environment and its relation to healthcare disparities; potential sources of racial and ethnic disparities at patient, provider, and system levels; potential interventions, including education for healthcare professionals, system strategies, and discussions on improving data collection and monitoring, to address the situation; and recommendations for future research. Pages 417–738 are available on a CD-ROM and include a series of papers on the history of racial and ethnic disparities in health care, healthcare disparities among Native Americans and Alaskan Natives, the culture of medicine, healthcare structure and financing, patient and provider communication, and aspects related to civil rights and healthcare disparities.

A major strength of the text is its detailed and comprehensive literature review that provides compelling evidence about the extent and types of racial and ethnic disparities in health care. Additional strengths include well-constructed summations of findings and recommendations that are germane to addressing the disparities in health care. The text carefully highlights limitations in some of the data and calls for better methods for data collection and monitoring. This congressionally mandated report is an essential refer-

ence tool for healthcare providers and administrators, policymakers, reimbursement agencies, and other individuals involved in today's healthcare arena. This one-of-a-kind text should serve as a foundation for addressing the racial and ethnic disparities in health care and ultimately improving health outcomes for racial and ethnic minority populations.

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Lung Cancer: Myths, Facts, Choices—

And Hope. Claudia I. Henschke and Peggy McCarthy, with Sarah Wernick. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002, 389 pages, \$27.95.

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The title of this book is an excellent indicator of its content. *Lung Cancer: Myths, Facts, Choices—And Hope* provides a blamefree approach to smokers; basic information about the lungs, how to find the right doctor, and types of treatment; lifesaving news about early detection; and advice about living with lung cancer. After reading this book, people with lung cancer and their families will be better able to make informed decisions about their treatment.

The primary author, Claudia I. Henschke, is a practicing physician and an advocate for low-dose screening computed tomography scans for individuals who are at risk for developing lung cancer. Henschke is joined by Peggy McCarthy, a prominent advocate for patients with cancer and founder of the Alliance for Lung Cancer Advocacy, Support, and Education (ALCASE). This team offers the fundamentals as well as the controversial topic of low-dose screening, something that still is not recommended by any major health organization nor covered by insurance plans. In addition, the text includes information about ALCASE, which is the only

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Ease of Reference and Usability

🕒 Quick, on-the-spot resource

✓ Basic

📖📖 Pocket size

🕒🕒 Moderate time requirement

✓✓ Intermediate

📖📖📖 Intermediate

🕒🕒🕒 In-depth study

✓✓✓ Advanced and complex, prerequisite reading required

📖📖📖📖 Desk reference