

Racism and Our Health Care System

A Conversation with Pastors

Racial and ethnic minorities experience higher rates of chronic disease and often receive unequal care from health care providers. The disparities in care that COVID-19 has revealed are not new. They are what we've come to expect. How can we change them? Three Black faith leaders in Memphis discussed the challenging issue of disparities and how congregations can respond. Four key themes emerged.

AWARENESS

Too often people in Black communities are unaware of the symptoms of serious health conditions and thus do not speak up when they have symptoms. Both the Black population and those who care for them need higher awareness of existing outcomes along racial lines and improve care to reduce the disparity.

The church can help raise awareness through education.

ACCESS

White providers may dismiss complaints of pain or symptoms in Black patients. In other situations, rules are broken for families of influence to receive care, but people with no connections can't get anything done. It's inequitable. Access comes from people of power giving up some of the power they hold.

The church can help fight for access by being a voice.

ADVOCACY

When a person comes into the hospital, the whole family enters the system. A nurse might care for a Black child and think the mother is never there, but the mother may have other children at home, no car, and depend on a transit line that's not running. Implicit bias fails to recognize that all those things are big barriers.

The church can advocate by being the bridge between those who are living the disparities and those who have the resources.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Too often the people who have the resources to help don't look like the people who need those resources most. At the same time, Black leaders must also be accountable when they are at the table where decisions are being made or in roles where they can influence change. Holding people in power accountable is a group effort.

The church can play a leading role in accountability by claiming its purpose in the community.

*Church Health hosted a webinar entitled *Racism and Our Health Care System: A Conversation with Pastors*, moderated by Dr. Kendra Hotz of Rhodes College with panelists Rev. Cortez Heaston of Faith Temple Missionary Baptist Church, Dr. Sarita Wilson-Guffin, director of spiritual care at Le Bonheur Children's Hospital and associate minister at St. Andrew AME Church, and Darren L. Thomas II, licensed preacher in the AME Church. The webinar is available at [available at www.churchhealth.org/fce/](http://www.churchhealth.org/fce/)*