

PROPOSED: ACCP Position Statement on Health Disparities in Jails and Prisons

The American College of Correctional Physicians (ACCP) recognizes the validity of the following:

1. Multiple studies have documented racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare in the United States. Racial and ethnic minorities are less likely to be prescribed a wide range of medical and surgical treatments than others. Racial and ethnic minorities as a group tend to have less confidence in the medical system and in their health care providers. They are less likely to seek out medical care when sick. The result of all of these disparities has led to overall worse medical outcomes for many racial and ethnic groups in the US healthcare system.
2. Multiple studies have documented racial and ethnic disparities in the US Criminal Justice system. Historically, racial and ethnic minorities have been more likely to be arrested, more likely to be found guilty in trial and more likely to be sentenced to long prison terms than others. These disparities have resulted in many racial and ethnic groups being over-represented in US jails and prisons.
3. Multiple studies have documented racial and ethnic disparities in training programs for medical professionals in the United States. In particular, racial and ethnic minorities are less likely than their counterparts to be selected for admission to medical schools, less likely to be selected for residency programs and less likely to be hired after finishing their medical training. These disparities have resulted in many racial and ethnic groups being under-represented in many healthcare professions, including as physicians.
4. Multiple studies have shown that all people have biases and prejudices that influence their decision making. Some of these biases and prejudices result from ignorance of other cultures and peoples. Many of these individual prejudices operate on a subconscious level. Human bias, prejudice and stereotyping, both conscious and subliminal, contribute to each of the racial and ethnic disparities listed above.

The American College of Correctional Physicians (ACCP) supports efforts to increase awareness of racial and ethnic disparities in Correctional Medicine and efforts to eliminate these disparities. These efforts should take place on several levels:

1. Increasing awareness among Correctional Healthcare workers of the historical problem of racial and ethnic disparities.
2. Promoting uniformity and equity of Correctional Healthcare. This can be accomplished by using Evidence-Based guidelines for the delivery of healthcare in jails and prisons.
3. Promoting increased representation of previously disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups in Correctional Healthcare.
4. Promoting Civil Rights legislation and litigation aimed at reducing racial and ethnic disparities in the criminal justice system.
5. Promoting efforts to collect data on access to healthcare and healthcare outcomes in Correctional Facilities.

ACCP strongly encourages each individual to acknowledge their own intrinsic biases and prejudices and actively work to eliminate any healthcare disparities that might arise from these. Examples of actions individuals can take include:

1. Seek to understand and validate each patient's individual ethnicity, background and culture.
2. Understand and acknowledge that individual patients will have varying levels of education, mastery of English, and trust of the "System" that will affect their ability to understand and accept healthcare.
3. Understanding that, based on culture, education and background, individual patients will vary in the following:
 - a. Their response and description of pain.
 - b. Their understanding of medications and medical procedures
 - c. Their willingness and ability to be candid with medical staff.
4. Acknowledge our own intrinsic biases and prejudices and seek to overcome them.
 - a. Do not prejudge patients based on their past history, culture, race, religion or mastery of English.
 - b. Do not prejudge patients based on their chief complaint, description of pain or other symptoms.
 - c. Do not prejudge patients based on their distrust of the medical system in general or in you in particular.
 - d. Actively work to provide uniform and fair medical care to all patients. This can be accomplished by using Evidence-Based guidelines for the delivery of healthcare in jails and prisons.