Do Cardiologists Perceive Racial or Ethnic Disparities in the Treatment of Heart Patients?

Results of a RAND Survey

Racial and ethnic disparities in care have been extensively documented. For example, the congressionally mandated report on health care disparities from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and the National Institute of Medicine’s report entitled Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care, both provide overwhelming evidence of racial and ethnic disparities in care. Much of the evidence comes from the field of cardiovascular care. A RAND Corporation study focuses specifically on cardiologists’ perceptions of disparities in care.

Percentage of Cardiologists Who Answered “Very/Somewhat Likely” When Asked: Do Clinically Similar Patients Receive Different Care on the Basis of Race/Ethnicity?

- Only one-third of cardiologists participating in the survey believe there are racial or ethnic discrepancies in the care given to heart patients.
- Cardiologists who acknowledge such disparities tend to place the problem elsewhere:
  - Only 12 percent said that racial or ethnic disparities exist in their own hospital or clinic.
  - Only 5 percent said that such disparities exist in their own practice.
- Black doctors are five times more likely than white doctors to state that such disparities exist.
- Women doctors are more than twice as likely as male doctors to state that such disparities exist.
- A sizeable majority of all participating doctors (69 percent) believe that there are disparities based on whether or not the patient is insured.
- Many doctors also feel that patient problems (such as failure to understand or adhere to treatment) cause disparities.
