COMMUNICATING RACIALIZED DATA

tools for naming and addressing
the impacts of racism
on maternal mortality

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“Maternal Mortality Media Training and Communications 101”
State Maternal Mortality Review Committees
Division of Reproductive Health
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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Levels of health intervention
Jones CP et al. *J Health Care Poor Underserved* 2009.
Addressing the social determinants of health

Primary prevention

Safety net programs and secondary prevention

Acute medical care and tertiary prevention
But how do disparities arise?

- Differences in the quality of care received within the health care system
- Differences in access to health care, including preventive and curative services
- Differences in life opportunities, exposures, and stresses that result in differences in underlying health status


Jones CP et al. *J Health Care Poor Underserved* 2009.
Differences in access to care
Differences in exposures and opportunities
Differences in quality of care
(ambulance slow or goes the wrong way)
Addressing the social determinants of equity:

Why are there differences in resources along the cliff face?

Why are there differences in who is found at different parts of the cliff?

Jones CP et al. *J Health Care Poor Underserved* 2009.
3 dimensions of health intervention
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Health services

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Health services

Addressing social determinants of health

Jones CP et al. *J Health Care Poor Underserved* 2009.
3 dimensions of health intervention

Health services

Addressing social determinants of health

Addressing social determinants of equity

“Why do we spend so much money on ambulances at the bottom of the cliff?”

Jones CP et al. *J Health Care Poor Underserved* 2009.
"Why are the Greenies launching themselves over the edge of the cliff?"

Jones CP et al. *J Health Care Poor Underserved* 2009.
“This situation looks fine to me. What’s the problem with a three-dimensional cliff?”

Dual Reality: A restaurant saga
I looked up and noticed a sign . . .
Racism structures “Open/Closed” signs in our society.
Those on the outside are very aware of the two-sided nature of the sign.

It is difficult to recognize a system of inequity that privileges us.
Is there really a two-sided sign?

Hard to know, when only see “Open”. A privilege not to HAVE to know. Once DO know, can choose to act.
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A system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks (which is what we call “race”), that

- Unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities
- Unfairly advantages other individuals and communities
- Saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources

Levels of Racism

- Institutionalized
- Personally-mediated
- Internalized

Institutionalized racism

- Differential access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society, by “race”

- Examples
  - Housing, education, employment, income
  - Medical facilities
  - Clean environment
  - Information, resources, voice

- Explains the association between social class and “race”

Personally-mediated racism

- Differential assumptions about the abilities, motives, and intents of others, by “race”
- Differential actions based on those assumptions

- Prejudice and discrimination

- Examples
  - Police brutality
  - Physician disrespect
  - Shopkeeper vigilance
  - Waiter indifference
  - Teacher devaluation

Internalized racism

- Acceptance by members of the stigmatized “races” of negative messages about our own abilities and intrinsic worth

- Examples
  - Self-devaluation
  - “White man’s ice is colder” syndrome
  - Resignation, helplessness, hopelessness

- Accepting limitations to our full humanity

Levels of Racism: A Gardener’s Tale

Who is the gardener?

- Power to decide
- Power to act
- Control of resources

- Dangerous when
  - Allied with one group
  - Not concerned with equity

“How is racism operating here?”

- **Identify mechanisms**
  - **Structures:** the *who?*, *what?*, *when?*, and *where?* of decision-making
  - **Policies:** the written *how?*
  - **Practices and norms:** the unwritten *how?*
  - **Values:** the *why?*

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Barriers to achieving health equity

- **Narrow focus on the individual**
  - Self-interest narrowly defined
  - Limited sense of interdependence
  - Limited sense of collective efficacy
  - Systems and structures as invisible or irrelevant

- **A-historical stance**
  - The present as disconnected from the past
  - Current distribution of advantage/disadvantage as happenstance
  - Systems and structures as givens and immutable

- **Myth of meritocracy**
  - “If you work hard you will make it”
  - Denial of racism
  - Two babies: Equal potential or equal opportunity?
Barriers to achieving health equity

- **Myth of zero-sum game**
  - “If you gain, I lose”
  - Fosters competition over cooperation
  - Masks the costs of inequity
  - Hinders efforts to grow the pie

- **Limited future orientation**
  - Disregard for the children
  - No “Seven generations” perspective
  - No “How are the children?” focus
  - Usurious relationship with the planet

- **Myth of American exceptionalism**
  - Disinterest in learning from others
  - Sense of US entitlement
Barriers to achieving health equity

- **White supremacist ideology**
  - Hierarchy in human valuation
  - “White” as the ideal and the norm
  - Sense of “White” entitlement
  - Dehumanization of people of color
  - Fear at the “browning” of America
What can we do today?
Look for evidence of two-sided signs
Burst through bubbles to experience our common humanity
Be interested
Believe
Join in
The stories of others
See “the absence of”
Reveal inaction in the face of need
Know our power
Action is power
Collective action is power
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