IMPROVING AFRICAN-AMERICAN RETENTION IN SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT

A series of educational products, guidance, and technical assistance for mental health providers, substance abuse treatment providers and primary care physicians who seek to elevate cultural competence efforts to include an understanding of the presence and impact of implicit racial bias in health care and substance abuse treatment.

TOPICS:

Scope of the Problem
What it Means to be African-American
Implicit Bias and Microaggression
Evidence-Based Strategies

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WHAT IS IMPLICIT RACIAL BIAS?

Implicit racial bias refers to attitudes, stigma or stereotypes that unconsciously affect our understanding, decisions and actions towards others. They are triggered involuntarily and without awareness or intentional control. These attitudes and feelings develop over a lifetime, as a result of life experiences, beginning at a very early age. *Implicit racial biases are not always consistent with our conscious beliefs.*

Nonetheless, implicit attitudes and stereotypes affect the way we interact with others, including African-Americans seeking treatment for substance use disorders.

HOW COMMON IS IT IN HEALTHCARE?

Healthcare in the United States has a long history of explicit and implicit racial discrimination. Because healthcare providers are highly educated, they may believe they are more objective than they truly are.

Studies show that most healthcare providers appear to have implicit positive attitudes towards Whites and implicit negative attitudes towards people of color.

Other data shows 92% of African-Americans report being discriminated against, with nearly 89% of African-Americans in counseling identifying “covert acts of racism” as a contributing factor to race-based trauma.

HOW DOES IMPLICIT RACIAL BIAS AFFECT RETENTION IN TREATMENT?

Studies show that implicit racial bias affects clinical, programmatic and systemic factors including:

- Clinical decision-making
- Clinician-patient interactions
- Barriers to treatment
- Lack of access to needed supportive services
- Reduced trust in physicians
- Decreased likelihood to follow treatment recommendations

All of the above are likely associated with the lower satisfaction with alcohol and drug treatment reported by African-Americans. Lower treatment satisfaction has been shown to be related to differences in treatment retention.