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Confronting racial disparities in end of life care

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In this day and age, one would not expect to find disparities in any form of health care. This, however, is not the case. Research has proven that even in the 21st century that there is a lack of hospice and end of life care services provided and received by minority populations. It is estimated that in the year 2050 there will be 439 million African Americans and other minorities that are over the age of 65. This percentage of 42% is more than double the 20% noted in 2000. In the United States, African Americans currently make up 12% of the population. Out of this population, less than 10% have utilized hospice and end of life services, while 80% of Caucasian races make up 80% of utilized services. It has also been shown that while 40% of Caucasian Americans over age 70 have advance directives, only 16% of African Americans have done so. Why is this? What continues to be the cause of minority races receiving fewer services than is available? How can we address and bring to the forefront these issues? How can minorities be better informed of services available and myths dispelled so that quality of care revolving around the end of life can be increased? The answer to these questions may not only lie in the misinformation of what hospice and end of life services are but also in the history of past healthcare issues relating to care given to minorities. One thing is for sure, it is up to us as not only a hospice and palliative care community but also as healthcare, in general, to deal head-on with the barriers and concerns that prevent minorities from being provided quality care.

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