

## How Dermatology Affects People of Color

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### Abstract

For many of us, going to the dermatologist is a normal experience. If you are having an intense breakout or you notice an unusual rash on your skin, chances are you are going to go to see a dermatologist where they will check it out and tell you exactly what the issue is. However, for many black and Hispanic patients, this does not seem to be the case.

### Discussion:

According to the article “Dermatology has a Problem with Skin Color,” “Black and Hispanic patients are far more likely than white patients to use the emergency room for dermatology problems, especially in rural areas and smaller cities where there are fewer dermatologists, studies have shown. People of color are half as likely as white patients to see a dermatologist for the same conditions” (Rabin, 2020, para. 42). But, why is this the case? There are multiple factors that could cause this disparity to happen, such as access to healthcare and lack of dermatologists in the area (Rabin, para. 43). However, the main reason for the racial divide that is present in dermatology is that these medical professionals are insufficiently trained to work with skin containing more melanin. Victoria Forster (2020), author of the article

“Dermatology has a Race Problem..,” stated that, “In a 2011 U.S. survey, almost half of dermatologists and dermatology residents reported that their medical training was inadequate to prepare them for diagnosing and treating conditions on Black skin” (para. 2). The lack of proper education in medical school is causing an unfortunate trend in dermatology that denies people of color adequate care.

Being able to notice this trend and draw attention to it is the first step to initiate change. Forster (2020) states that, “A 2018 study showed that only 4.5% of pictures in four major general medicine textbooks featured dark skin, a huge under-representation considering 13.4% of people in the U.S. are Black according to the 2019 census” (para. 7). This is a scary thing to read if you are looking to go into the dermatology field like myself. Many individuals who become doctors are passionate about helping people, so how are we supposed to keep that passion if we know we could end up hurting people and misdiagnosing them because of our lack of training? Jamé Jackson (2020), author of the article “Dermatology is Failing Black Patients..,” declares that “the five-year survival rate for Black patients diagnosed with melanoma is only 70 percent compared to a 94 percent rate for white patients...” (para 4). This fate of people of color with melanoma could be severely improved if only the education around black skin in dermatology was presented equally as much as the education around white skin. I believe that if medical schools revamp their dermatology education, then this disparity will change and the future for dermatologists and black patients will be brighter.

The changing demographic of our population is not properly represented in dermatology, not only because of the insufficient care to

black patients, but also because the majority of dermatologists in the United States are white.

### Conclusion:

Forster (2020) tells us, “Dermatology is the second least diverse medical specialty after orthopedic surgery. Only 9% of dermatologists in the United States are Black, Indigenous or Latinx” (para. 18). This significant difference contributes greatly to the way people of color are unintentionally excluded from quality care. In terms of career planning, for me this trend means that I need to do immense research on the medical schools I apply to. What percentage of students is not white? Do they adequately represent all ethnicities? What are their ideas around this trend? I would want to make sure the school I choose will properly prepare me for my career. I want to become a dermatologist to help people of all backgrounds and races and make them feel better about their health and skin. If I do not receive the proper training, I feel like I would be hurting people of color more than I am helping them. In order to combat that, I would want to educate myself on my own time as well about how different skin diseases and disorders look on different skin colors.

### REFERENCES

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