Introduction to the Special Series on Disparities in the Experience and Treatment of Addiction

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Imagine the stress that comes from living in inadequate housing within unsafe communities, struggling to afford food and other basic needs, and being physically isolated from good jobs, transportation, and health care. All of these stressors wreak havoc on the body and increase one's risk for chronic diseases including addiction, heart disease, cancer, and mental illness. In the United States as in other countries, racial and ethnic group membership often tracks with socioeconomic status; Black and Hispanic Americans are especially likely to experience the stress of poverty and some of the resulting health disparities. Healthcare providers sometimes exacerbate these challenges by treating African American and Hispanic patients in line with negative biases and stereotypes.

We believe that those of us who study addiction have a responsibility to learn more about the people who are disproportionately affected by it. This month, we dedicate The BASIS to the topic of racial and ethnic disparities in the experience and treatment of addiction. Today, The DRAM reviews a study of racial and ethnic disparities in the need for alcohol treatment and access to those treatments. Next week, ASHES reports on racial disparities in smoking cessation and smoking-related disease. STASH and The WAGER will expand this discussion to substance use and gambling, respectively. Because we believe that the study of needs is incomplete without the study of strengths, in each of this month's posts, we will describe ways in which disadvantaged groups show resilience against these challenges or respond favorably to evidence-based interventions.

We will supplement these science reviews with an op-ed by a Dr. Ben Cook, Director of the Health Equity Research Lab and the Center for Multicultural Mental Health Research at Cambridge Health Alliance. Dr. Cook has studied the causes and consequences of health disparities in detail and will share his perspectives with our readers.

Welcome to our Special Series on Disparities in the Experience and Treatment of Addiction.

–Heather Gray

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