

OUR VIEW: ESSENTIAL HOSPITALS WORK TO REDUCE RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES

HEALTH CARE DISPARITIES PERSIST IN THE UNITED STATES

Equitable access to health services is essential to better care, healthier individuals and populations, and lower costs. But care disparities persist in the United States for a variety of chronic, acute, and behavioral conditions. Here are examples:

- African American women are more likely to die of breast cancer than white Americans.
- Hispanic patients with heart disease are significantly less likely to undergo surgery for their condition compared with white patients
- African Americans have higher rates of hospital admissions for congestive heart failure compared with non-Hispanic whites.

DISPARITIES RESULT FROM POOR ACCESS

While advances in genetic engineering, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and other technologies have significantly improved U.S. medical care over the past 30 years, many patients still face challenges accessing this better care.

For example, research shows that a greater percentage of Hispanics and non-Hispanic blacks have no usual source of care compared with non-Hispanic whites. Studies attribute this largely to insufficient access to health

care services due to lack of insurance, lower income, and language barriers.

Improving access could increase the use of simple preventive measures (blood pressure management, for example) and ultimately reduce disparities and improve health outcomes.

KNOWN INTERVENTIONS CAN REDUCE DISPARITIES

Research shows these interventions can reduce disparities across a wide variety of conditions, such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, depression, and substance abuse:

- early screening for certain cancers, leading to prompt detection and treatment
- culturally tailored treatment and management programs that remove language barriers and improve health literacy
- case management that emphasizes improved communication among providers
- integration of community resources with medical care to improve overall well-being

SUPPORT PROGRAMS THAT WORK

Essential hospitals work to improve access and eliminate health care disparities.

- To encourage communitywide healthful behaviors, Arrowhead Regional Medical Center, in Colton, California, launched an initiative that included a health and safety fair, 5K walk and run, nutritional classes, and complimentary cancer screenings. More than 2,700 screenings revealed 20 confirmed cases of early stage cancer.
- To reduce avoidable emergency department visits, the University of Texas Medical Branch, in Galveston, created a program to provide patients with a care management team. Since its inception, the hospital has seen a 53 percent and a 65 percent increase in diabetic and hypertensive patients meeting blood pressure goals, respectively.