Achieving Health Equity

tools for addressing RACISM and other systems of structured inequity

Camara Phyllis Jones, MD, MPH, PhD

Keynote Address
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“One practice team, built on creativity and leadership, He aha te kai o te rangatira? He korero, he korero, he korero”
Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners

Auckland, New Zealand
July 27, 2018
National Campaign Against Racism

Name racism
Ask “How is racism operating here?”
Organize and strategize to act
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Levels of health intervention

Jones CP et al.  *J Health Care Poor Underserved* 2009.
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Addressing the social determinants of health

Primary prevention

Safety net programs and secondary prevention

Acute medical care and tertiary prevention
But how do disparities arise?

- Differences in the quality of care received within the health care system
- Differences in access to health care, including preventive and curative services
- Differences in life opportunities, exposures, and stresses that result in differences in underlying health status


Jones CP et al. *J Health Care Poor Underserved* 2009.
Differences in access to care
Differences in exposures and opportunities
Differences in quality of care  
(ambulance slow or goes the wrong way)

Addressing the social determinants of equity:

Why are there differences in resources along the cliff face?

Why are there differences in who is found at different parts of the cliff?

Jones CP et al. *J Health Care Poor Underserved* 2009.
3 dimensions of health intervention
3 dimensions of health intervention

*Health services*

Jones CP *et al.* *J Health Care Poor Underserved* 2009.
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Health services

Addressing social determinants of health
3 dimensions of health intervention

Health services

Addressing social determinants of health

Addressing social determinants of equity

I looked up and noticed a sign . . .
Racism structures “Open/Closed” signs in our society.
It is difficult to recognize a system of inequity that privileges us. Those on the outside are very aware of the two-sided nature of the sign.
Is there really a two-sided sign?

Hard to know, when only see “Open”. A privilege not to HAVE to know. Once DO know, can choose to act.
What is racism?

A system

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A system of structuring opportunity and assigning value

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- Saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources

Levels of Racism

- Institutionalized
- Personally-mediated
- Internalized

Institutionalized racism

- Differential access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society, by “race”

- **Examples**
  - Housing, education, employment, income
  - Medical facilities
  - Clean environment
  - Information, resources, voice

- Explains the association between social class and “race”

Personally-mediated racism

- Differential assumptions about the abilities, motives, and intents of others, by “race”
- Differential actions based on those assumptions

- Prejudice and discrimination
- Examples
  - Police brutality
  - Physician disrespect
  - Shopkeeper vigilance
  - Waiter indifference
  - Teacher devaluation

Internalized racism

- Acceptance by the stigmatized “races” of negative messages about our own abilities and intrinsic worth

- Examples
  - Self-devaluation
  - “White man’s ice is colder” syndrome
  - Resignation, helplessness, hopelessness

- Accepting limitations to our full humanity

Levels of Racism: A Gardener’s Tale

Who is the gardener?

- Power to decide
- Power to act
- Control of resources

- Dangerous when
  - Allied with one group
  - Not concerned with equity

“How is racism operating here?”

- **Identify mechanisms**
  - **Structures:** the who?, what?, when?, and where? of decision-making
  - **Policies:** the written how?
  - **Practices and norms:** the unwritten how?
  - **Values:** the why?

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What is [inequity]?

A system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on [fill in the blank]
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Many axes of inequity

- “Race”
- Gender
- Ethnicity and indigenous status
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- Labor roles and social class markers
- Nationality, language, and immigration status
- Sexual orientation and gender identity
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These are risk MARKERS
What is health equity?

Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners:

- The right and opportunity to attain your health potential no matter who you are or where you are from

He oranga pai ki ngā tāngata katoa, he ahakoa ko wai, he ahakoa nō whea
What is health equity?

- “Health equity” is assurance of the conditions for optimal health for all people

- Achieving health equity requires
  - Valuing all individuals and populations equally
  - Recognizing and rectifying historical injustices
  - Providing resources according to need

- Health disparities will be eliminated when health equity is achieved

Barriers to achieving health equity

- **Narrow focus on the individual**
  - Self-interest narrowly defined
  - Limited sense of interdependence
  - Limited sense of collective efficacy
  - Systems and structures as invisible or irrelevant

- **A-historical culture**
  - The present as disconnected from the past
  - Current distribution of advantage/disadvantage as happenstance
  - Systems and structures as givens and immutable

- **Myth of meritocracy**
  - Role of hard work
  - Denial of racism
  - Two babies: Equal potential or equal opportunity?
Life on a Conveyor Belt: Moving to action
Racism is most often passive
1. Name racism
2. Ask “How is racism operating here?”
3. Organize and strategize to act
Camara Phyllis Jones, MD, MPH, PhD

Past President
American Public Health Association

Senior Fellow
Satcher Health Leadership Institute and
Cardiovascular Research Institute

Adjunct Associate Professor
Department of Community Health and Preventive Medicine
Morehouse School of Medicine

cpjones@msm.edu
+1 (404) 756-5216
+1 (404) 374-3198 mobile