

Hidden in Plain Text:

A Presentation from the Racial Equity & Leadership Committee of the
ICCMHC



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The Study

“Our study aimed to examine medical providers’ use of negative patient descriptors in the history and physical notes and whether use varied by patient race or ethnicity.”

Hypothesis

“We hypothesized that chart notes in the EHR with stigmatizing language may be disproportionately applied to racially minoritized patients.”

Indications of Systemic Bias

“Such a pattern of disproportionate use may indicate systemic biases in a health care delivery system against racially minoritized patients.”

(Sun, et al., 2022. p. 2)

A blue starburst graphic with multiple points, containing the text "2.54x" in a large, bold, black font.

2.54x

Sun, et al., (2022) found that “Black patients had 2.54 times the odds of having at least one negative descriptor...” (p. 1).

Physicians

Dr. Sun, et al., (2022) noted that “Lisa Cooper and colleagues used audio recordings of health care encounters and found that...”

“Physicians who tested higher on implicit bias measures were more verbally dominant and used less patient-centered language with Black Patients” (p. 1; Cooper, et al., 2012)

Perceived Racial Discrimination

Dr. Sun, et al., (2022) point to a study by Blanchard and Lurie, which found that

“Patients who perceived racial discrimination in health care were more likely to delay care, less likely to receive recommended chronic disease screening, and less likely to follow their physician’s recommendations.” (p. 1; Blanchard, et al., 2004)

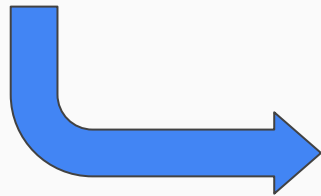
Stigmatizing Language on Providers' Perceptions

Dr. Sun et al., (2022) pointed to a study that found “when medical providers were shown a hypothetical chart note containing stigmatizing language...”

“they [the provider] were more likely to have a negative perception of the patient’s pain and to formulate a less aggressive pain management plan than when presented with a chart note without stigmatizing language.” (p. 2; Godda, et al., 2018)

Systemic Structures of Bias

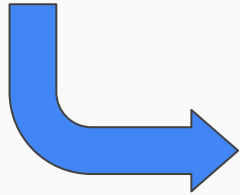
“We recognize the use of negative descriptors might not necessarily reflect bias among individual providers; rather, it may reflect a **broader systemic acceptability of using negative patient descriptors as a surrogate for identifying structural barriers.**”



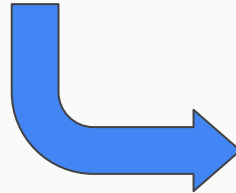
“...race-based differences in treatment compliance often reflect underlying structural challenges (for example, medical distrust or financial hardship) **rather than individual patient motivations or behaviors.**” (Sun, et al., 2022, p. 4)

Potential Impact of Provider Bias

“It is also plausible that if a provider with implicit biases were to document a patient encounter with stigmatizing language,



the note may influence the perceptions and decisions of other members of the care team,



irrespective of the other team members' biases or lack thereof.” (Sun, et al., 2022, p. 7)

References

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- Cooper, L., Roter, D., Carson, K., Beach, M., Sabin, J., Greenwald, A., & Inui, T. (2012). The associations of clinicians' implicit attitudes about race with medical visit communication and patient ratings of interpersonal care. *Am J Public Health*. 102(5): 979-87.
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- Sun, M., Tomasz, O., Peek, M., & Tung, E. (2022). Negative patient descriptors: Document racial bias in the Electronic Health Record. *Health Affairs* 41, No. 2. DOI: 10.1377/hlthaff.2021.01423

Improving Notes in the EHR

Bias in the Electronic Health Record

Sun M, Oliwa T, Peak M, & Tung E, (2022) *Negative patient descriptors: Documenting racial bias in the electronic health record*, Health Affairs.



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After taking this course, you should be able to:

- Recognize some of the “shortcut” words which could carry implicit meanings or biases
- Identify ways to write notes while working from the reasoning, critical thinking part of the brain
- Write notes that describe client actions instead of using “shortcut” words that could be harmful

In recent studies

Compared with White patients, Black patients had 2.54 times the odds of having at least one negative descriptor in the notes.

Between 2005 and 2013 12.3 percent of Black respondents reported discrimination in health care compared to 2.3 percent of Whites in the CDC study.

In 2020, four national surveys found that between 11 and 20 percent of Black adults reported experiencing discrimination in health care during the previous year.

Multiple studies have documented **implicit bias** impacts in health care including the patient-provider relationship, communication, and delays in care.

Other Studies Showed

Structural Racism During COVID-19 showed differential access to goods, services and opportunities

Explicitly stigmatizing language may have consequences for patient care. When providers were shown hypothetical chart notes with stigmatizing language in them, providers were:

- More likely to have a negative perception of the patient's pain

- And more likely to formulate a less aggressive pain management plan

Who Reads Your Notes?

Other clinicians:

- Therapists

- Care Managers

- Peer Support Specialists

MDs, NPs, PAs

Auditors - internal and external

Some words identified as imposing bias

Non-adherent

Exaggerated

Aggressive

Hysterical

Agitated

Unpleasant

Angry

Combative

Manipulative

Non-compliant

Defiant

Confrontational

Oppositional

Non-Cooperative

Borderline

Defensive

Out-

Client A

Client seems a bit hysterical and is accusing agency staff of not protecting her personal health information. During the session she becomes mean and accusatory.

How could the note be rewritten to describe the situation without using negative descriptors?

Client said she is angry because she feels the agency staff did not protect her personal health information. Talked with her about the process for officially reporting a PHI breach.

What could be the ramifications of labeling a client as hysterical, mean, or accusatory?

Client B

Attempted to support client in verbally processing stressors, encouraging ongoing engagement with self-care plan and continued utilization of CBT to support change in negative thinking patterns. But client was agitated and became aggressive by the end of the session. Unable to complete session as planned.

How could the note be rewritten to describe the situation without using negative descriptors?

During first half of the session supported client in verbally processing stressors, encouraging ongoing engagement with self-care plan and continued utilization of CBT to support change in negative thinking patterns. As session progressed, client said his anxiety was increasing and his volume increased. Completed session with relaxation activity.

What could be the ramifications of a client being seen as agitated or aggressive? What could happen if you wrote in a note you were “unable to complete the session”?

Client C

Client said they were living with numerous relatives and non-relatives and that there were people coming and going at all hours. It seemed chaotic.

How could the note be written with less possible bias?

Client reports sharing their housing.

What could be the possible ramifications of describing the client's home life as chaotic?

Client D

Client reports being nervous to begin new medications . Processed client's past experiences and their impact on current functioning. Tried to utilize active listening CBT to support change in negative thinking patterns but client grew more and more combative as the session progressed. By the end of the session he was non-compliant with any recommendations for medication use.

How could the note be written without negative descriptors?

...client continued to express anxiety about change and did not agree to start medication. Will continue to use motivational interviewing techniques in next appointment.

What could be the ramifications of describing a client as non-compliant?

Contrary to expectations

Notes written after the pandemic began were associated with decreased odds of having a negative descriptor in the EHR.

Social pressures associated with the police murders of George Floyd and others **may** have sensitized providers to racism and increased empathy for the experiences of racially minority communities. More research is needed.

Shifting the Paradigm

- ★ How we write notes can reflect how we interact with clients.
- ★ We can interact with clients using a set of strategies designed to help clients discover their own greatness or “inner wealth,” the Nurtured Heart Approach (NHA).
- ★ This approach transforms the way clients see themselves in relation to the world by altering the way others (including us) respond to them.
- ★ By embracing NHA, we learn how to see what is right in the moment rather than responding to what is going wrong.

Nurtured Heart Approach

We achieve that paradigm shift by learning how to embrace core stands to help with transformation. These include:

- ★ Not giving any energy to negative behaviors including not writing them in the chart
- ★ Relentlessly and strategically energizing the client's successes no matter how small including writing them in the chart. This is one way of consistently presenting them with evidence of how great they are.

Brief Panel Discussion

With the Racial Equity & Leadership Committee

