

HEALTH DISPARITY IN BLACK WOMEN: LACK OF PHARMACEUTICAL ADVERTISING IN BLACK VS. WHITE- ORIENTED MAGAZINES

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Context: Racial disparities in health care between black women and white women may be attributed in part to socioeconomic status and lack of insurance, but also may be due to lack of the dissemination of health information in black communities via black popular magazines. *Objective:* Comparison of the number and type of pharmaceutical advertisements between black-oriented magazines and white-oriented magazines. *Design:* Descriptive study. *Setting:* Morehouse School of Medicine. *Main Outcome Measures:* Recording of the type and number of over-the-counter and prescription drug advertisements. *Results:* Five black-oriented magazines (*Black Woman, Black Elegance, Essence, Ebony, and Upscale*) and 5 white-oriented magazines (*Family Circle, Working Mother, Good Housekeeping, Ladies' Home Journal, Women's Day*) were evaluated for 3 months from June-August, 2000. White-oriented magazines had four to eight times more pharmaceutical ads than black-oriented magazines. Types of medications advertised in the white-oriented magazines and not the black-oriented magazines were, for example, cholinesterase inhibitors, calcium supplements, COX II-inhibitors, intranasal steroids, anorexiant, proton pump inhibitors, and smoking deterrent agents. Conversely, medications advertised in the black-oriented magazines and not the white-oriented magazines were antiviral agents and oral contraceptives. Pharmaceutical companies gave several reasons for the disparity, including the explanation that their particular company was advertising about HIV in the black community. *Conclusions:* A barrier to equitable health care for black women may be a low prioritization for health prevention and health management. This low prioritization or disinterest may be a reflection of the black magazine that she is reading due to the lack of pharmaceutical advertisements in black-oriented magazines. The result of this disinterest of black females may be seen in the increased morbidity and mortality for selected diseases. (*J Natl Med Assoc.* 2001; 93:263-266.)

Key words: African American ♦ black females ♦ health disparity ♦ media

As is well-known, there is a health disparity present for black women as compared to white women. According to Mayberry et al.,¹ African-American

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women showed a delay in accessing prenatal care compared to white women and, as a result, showed a higher incidence of hospitalization for pregnancy loss and antenatal complications. Consistently, African-American women showed a longer hospital stay.

According to the 1985 Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Black and Minority Health,² black women had a higher mortality and higher incidence rate compared to white women who were diagnosed with cardiovascular disease. Possible reasons were less primary doctor office visits and more emergency room visits. Subsequently, being less often seen by cardiologists, black women were also noted to be scheduled more frequently for coronary bypass surgery or coronary arteriography than white women. Schulman et al.³ showed in their study that black women were 60% less likely to be referred to cardiac catheterization compared to white women.

The existence of a racial health disparity has been found to be due to socioeconomic status, disease staging, and insurance status.¹ Even when these confounders are controlled, a disparity still exists. Health care advertising may play a role in this disparity.

The importance of magazines as a media source of advertising was studied by Erdos and Morgan.⁴ A survey of 8,000 random consumers was performed to determine the role of media in advertising. The largest majority surveyed (43%) trust or believe advertisements published in magazines compared to television or the Internet. Similarly, 44% said they are more likely to purchase a product advertised in a magazine compared to television or the Internet. It was concluded that advertisements in magazines have more consumer attention than other media choices and consumers are more likely to purchase products advertised in magazines.

Previous research has studied alcohol advertising,⁵ cigarette advertising,⁶ and nutrition advertising.⁷ Each study showed a significant difference in the advertising directed to the black community compared to the white community. All studies were in agreement that the health of blacks was not being promoted in those areas.

Leslie⁸ has shown how advertising on health care in the predominately read black-oriented magazine, *Ebony*, has evolved over the last 30 years, since 1957. He randomly looked at monthly issues of *Ebony* from the 1950s, 1970s, and 1980s. He found that health

care advertising increased more than two times, as shown in 1987. More importantly, this is not comparable to health care advertising in white-oriented magazines. According to Templeton,⁹ \$1 billion was spent on advertising targeted to African Americans in 1997, which is much less than what might be expected for a group comprising 12% of the total population. Furthermore, he surmises that \$3.45 billion would be more equitable, if African-Americans' contribution to the national income is taken into account.

The importance of medical drug advertising was examined in an article by Flynn.¹⁰ He explains that "direct-to-consumer" advertising has the following benefits: (1) patients are informed that a treatment is available for a particular medical problem; (2) patients are made aware that certain symptoms are associated with a specific medical problem; and (3) patients are informed of the production of new vaccines and better drugs having less side effects.

Limited research has been done evaluating medical drugs in popular magazines. Wofford¹¹ showed that there were frequent health-related messages in consumer advertisements in white-oriented magazines. Most of these ads were for over-the-counter medications. In contrast, no research, according to an extensive literature search, has been done evaluating black-oriented women magazines for the quantity and choice of medical drugs.

This study will show the disparity of pharmaceutical advertisements in black-oriented magazines vs. white-oriented magazines. In addition, comments by pharmaceutical companies and black-oriented magazines will be mentioned.

METHODS

This research study was initiated by obtaining acknowledgment of institutional review board exemption. The selection of magazines was based on the circulation number and the accessibility of the black magazines at the "newsstand" in local supermarkets or drugstores. Five black-oriented magazines and five white-oriented magazines were chosen. The black-oriented magazines were *Black Woman*, *Ebony*, *Upscale*, *Essence*, and *Black Elegance*. The white-oriented magazines were *Woman's Day*, *Working Mother*, *Family Circle*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Ladies' Home Journal*. Each was reviewed consecutively from June to August, 2000.

The following information was manually counted

Table 1. Comparison of Average Pharmaceutical Advertisements between Black-oriented and White-oriented Magazines from June through September 2000

	Black-oriented magazines (<i>Black Woman, Ebony, Black Elegance, Essence, Upscale</i>)	White-oriented magazines (<i>Family Circle, Working Mother, Good Housekeeping, Ladies' Home Journal, Woman's Day</i>)
June	2.0	9.3
July	1.6	10
Aug.	1.25	11.0

from each magazine by the principal investigator: number of medical drugs (prescription or nonprescription) advertised throughout the entire magazine for each issue.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the comparison of pharmaceutical advertisements in black vs. white magazines' for 10 popular magazines from June to August, 2000. The results show a large disparity, with black-oriented magazines having far less pharmaceutical ads than white-oriented magazines.

Table 2 lists examples of the types of medical drugs advertised in both African-American and white-oriented magazines. This small number of drugs is in stark contrast to the findings in Table 3. Table 3 shows drugs advertised primarily in the white-oriented magazines. All the drugs listed in this table, except for two, were found in one or more of the white-oriented magazines and not in any of the African-American-oriented magazines.

DISCUSSION

According to the data presented, the disparity of medical drugs advertised in the summer of 2000

Table 2. Medical Drugs Advertised in Both Black- vs. White-Oriented Women Magazines from June through August, 2000

Type of drug	Black-oriented magazine	White-oriented magazine
Antihistamine	YES	YES
Vaginal Antifungal Agent	YES	YES
Anti-infective Combination Product	YES	YES
Analgesics	YES	YES
Impotence Agents	YES	YES

Table 3.

Type of drug	Black-oriented magazines	White-oriented magazines
Cholinesterase inhibitor	NO	YES
Calcium supplement	NO	YES
COX II-inhibitor	NO	YES
Multivitamin	NO	YES
Selective estrogen receptor modulator	NO	YES
Intranasal steroids	NO	YES
Anorexiant	NO	YES
Smoking deterrent	NO	YES
Antidepressant	NO	YES
Antihyperlipidemic agent	NO	YES
Combination estrogen and progestin	NO	YES
Proton pump inhibitor	NO	YES
Recombinant human erythropoietin	NO	YES
Antiemetic/antivertigo agent	NO	YES
Laxative	NO	YES
Hyaluronic acid derivative	NO	YES
Histamine H ₂ antagonists	NO	YES
Antiviral agent	YES	NO
Oral contraceptive	YES	NO

between black- vs. white-oriented magazines is clearly seen. Within these months, a black woman reading the five black-oriented magazines would not have the option of viewing information on medications used for the treatment of, for example, osteoporosis, menopause, Alzheimer's dementia, weight reduction, dyspepsia, and joint pain/inflammation, constipation, high cholesterol, tobacco abuse, and depression.

In contrast, a white woman reading one or more of the five white-oriented magazines and none of the black-oriented magazines would not have the option of viewing pharmaceutical advertisements for the treatment of HIV or contraception.

Furthermore, when selected pharmaceutical companies were asked the reason for the disparity, the following reasons were given: (1) there is no disparity and we plan to advertise more in black women magazines; (2) we are advertising about HIV in the black community; (3) most black magazines don't enlist the pharmaceutical companies for ad-

vertisements; (4) the model for a white magazine advertisement doesn't make sense in a black magazine; and (5) the marketed drug is new and there is not enough available money to target other magazines.

In comparison, when one of the black-oriented magazines was asked why the presence of a disparity of medical drug advertisements, the following reason was given: the cost per page of this black-oriented magazine is higher than many white-oriented magazines.

The limitations of this study consisted of comparing magazines over a short period of 3 months. It is possible that if the analysis had been carried over a longer time period, such as a year, the disparity may not have been as apparent.

Another limitation is the human error involved in the manual counting of pharmaceutical advertisements. Reviewing 10 magazines over 3 months with an average of 100 pages consisted of analyzing 3000 pages by hand for pharmaceutical advertisements.

So, why should this be a concern that black women are less exposed to advertised medical drugs than white women? The more knowledgeable a patient is regarding health care, the more likely she will utilize the health care system in a more productive, timely, and cost-effective manner. This change could possibly make a difference in the present healthcare disparity found between black and white women for certain medical conditions.

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