

Diversity in executive healthcare leadership: Does it matter? Perspectives and implications for access to care by people of color

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Abstract: One third of the U. S. population belongs to an ethnic group other than non-Hispanic White and that population is growing increasingly diverse. People of color are increasingly accessing healthcare services, yet they represent less than one percent of healthcare leadership.

The primary purpose of this study is to address two key research questions: 1. What are the opinions and perceptions of White healthcare executives and executives of color regarding the race of healthcare executives and how it may affect access to care for people of color? 2. To what extent do White healthcare executives and healthcare executives of color vary in their opinions about how to improve access to healthcare for people of color?

This research is based on qualitative data obtained from interviews of key informants who are healthcare leaders in North Carolina and South Carolina. Informants were selected using a convenience sampling strategy. They were asked about their perspectives on the representation of people of color in executive healthcare leadership; what prevents people of color from obtaining senior leadership roles in greater numbers; and how the absence of people of color in senior leadership roles impacts access to healthcare services for people of color.

There was acknowledgement from informants that people of color are underrepresented in the most senior level healthcare leadership roles. Informants perceived that racial diversity on the executive leadership team can have a positive influence on access to healthcare by people of color. Informants believe that the race of healthcare executives can impact access to care by people of color. There is a prevailing perception among informants that the best way to improve access for people of color is through increased cultural competency. There is congruity between elements highlighted in existing literature and responses from key informants about racial diversity, cultural competency, and the impact that diversity in executive healthcare leadership can have on access to healthcare by people of color. A number of strategies are presented to promote diversity in executive healthcare leadership as a way to ultimately improve access to healthcare.

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