

Patient Preferences and Perceptions of Provider Diversity in Orthopaedic Surgery

Marsalis Brown¹, Mingda Chen, John T Strony², Elisabeth Kroneberger, Michael Karns³, Michael J. Salata³, James Everett Voos⁴, Robert J Gillespie

¹University Hospitals - Cleveland Medical Center, ²University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center, ³University Hospitals Case Medical Center, ⁴UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS CASE MEDICAL CENTER

INTRODUCTION: Orthopaedic surgery has historically been among the least demographically diverse specialties in medicine. Currently, limited data exist on how patients perceive diversity within the field and what patients look for when choosing an orthopaedic surgeon. The purpose of this study was to identify specific patient preferences for surgeon demographics and understand patient perceptions of racial and gender diversity in orthopaedic surgery.

METHODS: Nonconsecutive patients from orthopaedic clinics affiliated with an academic health system voluntarily participated in a 39-item questionnaire that surveyed basic demographic information, perception of diversity, racial/gender preferences during surgeon selection, and perception of healthcare inequalities. Bivariate analyses were used to test the association between patient/surgeon demographic variables and ratings of diversity. Multiple regression models were used to identify independent predictors of overall perceived diversity ratings.

RESULTS:

A total of 349 patients were analyzed (80.6% White, 17.9% Black, 1.5% Other). Black patients were 5.62 times as likely as White patients to experience difficulty relating to their orthopaedic surgeon ($p < 0.005$). Moreover, Black patients were 14.44 times more likely than their White counterparts to endorse perceived racial bias from their surgeon ($p < 0.02$). While the level of racial diversity perceived by White patients (2.57/10) was significantly higher than that perceived by Black patients (2.10/10) ($p = 0.001$), the absolute difference between these two figures was small, suggesting that both groups perceived the racial diversity in the field to be low. White and Black patients differed in their importance ranking of surgeon's race ($p < 0.0001$), where Black patients ranked surgeon's race with higher importance (Mean 3.49/10, Median 3/10) when selecting a surgeon compared to White patients (Mean 1.45/10, median 0/10). Both male and female patients gave relatively low importance rankings for surgeon's gender (male 1.58/10 vs. female 2.15/10, $p = 0.02$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: Patients in this study did not perceive the field of orthopaedic surgery as a diverse field (overall diversity rating $< 3/10$). There were significant racial and gender differences in patient preference for specific physician characteristics when choosing orthopaedic surgeons, which may help explain some instances of perceived racial bias and difficulty relating to their orthopaedic surgeon.