

2 nations of health care: Blacks lag

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Blacks in the USA still lag far behind whites when it comes to medical care, despite being at higher risk for many health problems, new studies confirm.

The studies, in today's *Journal of the American Medical Association*, mark the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr.

Blacks, on average, are in poorer health than whites and have shorter life expectancy.

"The problem is that socio-economically, they're still disadvantaged, and that's where the problem arises," says AMA trustee Dr. Lonnie R. Bristow, author of a related editorial.

Among the studies:

► A survey of 10,130 people nationwide finds that blacks average 3.4 doctor visits a year compared with 4.4 for whites, and are more likely to be dissatisfied with medical care.

It also finds blacks are less likely than whites to get yearly dental checkups and less likely to visit the doctor when they're chronically or seriously ill.

► Another report notes that 5 percent of USA med-school graduates and 3 percent of practicing doctors are black, though blacks make up 12 percent of the USA's population.

► A third report concludes many tests of new drugs don't involve enough black subjects, suggesting researchers may lack information to determine the drugs' safety for blacks.

► A study of 109,575 Massachusetts patients with heart disease found that whites were 29 percent more likely to undergo a diagnostic angiography; 89 percent more likely to get bypass operations than blacks.

"There is a continuing economic racism in the country," says Bristow. "It has improved vastly over the last 50 years but many blacks still don't have access to schools, housing and jobs, and therefore to appropriate kinds of insurance."

That echoes the Kerner Commission report of nearly 21 years ago that concluded we were moving toward two nations, "one black, one white — separate and unequal."



Part I, Page 1