

Race and distrust

Word count: 185

Rajakumar et al (1) have done a valuable service in demonstrating the lack of trust that African American parents have in the practice of medicine. Their article alludes to “a cultural memory of victimization,” and Saha’s editorial (2) mentions “the persistence of racially segregated medical facilities until the 1960s.” Both articles refer to the unethical, unforgivable Tuskegee Syphilis Study.

Readers unfamiliar with the medical side of American racial history need to know that medical maltreatment of African Americans neither began nor ended with Tuskegee. Black slaves were subjects of medical experiments; freed blacks were used after the Civil War. Cadavers of African Americans were taken or stolen for use in anatomy courses. After Tuskegee, “African Americans’ illnesses were not simply observed but were also induced when subjects were administered toxic substances or deliberately exposed to a wide range of biological hazards, including lethal radiation doses, hazardous experimental techniques, a wide range of untested chemical products, risky nontherapeutic vaccines, and injections with infectious agents [organisms of plasmodium and falciparum malaria].”(3) (Material in brackets is not part of original quote.)

Mistrust in such a system hardly seems unjustified.

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