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Opinion

Despite Progress, Colorectal Cancer Claims

Few diseases cause as much pain and suffering as cancer. While survivors, activists, policymakers and healthcare professionals have been successful in raising awareness for some types of cancer, others are not as high profile. Among them: colorectal cancer, the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths among men and women combined in the U.S. Even less widely known is the fact that African Americans have the highest incidence and mortality rates for colorectal cancer.

The disparities are impossible to ignore. African Americans are about 25 percent more likely than Whites to be diagnosed with this form of cancer, and about 50 percent more likely to die from it. This is particularly troubling when considering that, in many cases, colorectal cancer can be prevented and is highly treatable, if it's detected early, according to the American Cancer Society.

While we're still working to understand why African-Americans are more susceptible to this type of cancer, one of the causes of the disparity in mortality is that minorities lag behind in screening for colorectal cancer. Researchers at the University of Texas have shown that African-Americans are less likely than White patients to receive a colonoscopy — the most common form



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of colorectal cancer screening — even when controlling for health insurance coverage and access to quality healthcare providers.

Both patients and providers bear some responsibility for the lower rates of colorectal cancer screening among Af-

“There’s also a need for a broader conversation about increased risk and the need for prompt, diligent colorectal cancer screening in the African-American community

frican-Americans. On the patient side, African-Americans may not know that they are at a heightened risk of experiencing colorectal cancer earlier than other groups. In the Black community, the share of colorectal cancer cases that occur before the generally recommended screening age of 50 is almost twice as high as among Whites. That’s why experts advise African Americans to begin screening at age 45, five years earlier than other groups.

But encouraging early and proactive screening is compli-

cated. The invasiveness of the procedure, coupled with fears of pain, often causes African American patients to rule it out as a preventive measure. What’s more, a lack of access to a physician they trust leads many members of the African American community to delay this important procedure until it’s too late.

In addition, healthcare providers sometimes contribute to the low colorectal cancer screening rates among African Americans. A recommendation from a physician has been shown to increase the

tivity all can have an impact.

That’s why healthcare providers must treat each patient in a way that takes into account all of the influences on their health. This includes their race and ethnicity, which in the case of colorectal cancer is a critical factor in determining whether a physician should recommend a colonoscopy, when a patient’s screening should start and concerns a doctor should address about the procedure.

Training healthcare professionals to understand the unique colorectal cancer risks of African Americans, as well as the unease with which many view colonoscopies, is an important step toward increasing screening rates and catching more cases in their early stages. There’s also a need for a broader conversation about increased risk and the need for prompt, diligent colorectal cancer screening in the community.

Fortunately, incidence and mortality rates for colorectal cancer have been on the decline among both African-Americans and other racial groups across the board, but substantial gaps in health outcomes remain. Healthcare providers and the African-American community must work together to ensure that all patients have and take advantage of the opportunity to access a colonoscopy or other screening procedure that could save their life.

Facebook’s “Ethnic Affinities” Is Digital Racism

Racism is a malignant, powerful, and harmful reality for millions of persons of color throughout the world. Here, inside the United States, racism is institutionalized and we have the evidence that this dreadful, racially discriminatory system of oppression now has been digitized thanks to Facebook.

We must oppose all forms, nuances, and modes of racism. I am defining “digital racism” as the deliberate and systematic exclusion and discrimination of people from any Internet access, benefit or policy-making procedure based on race, color, ethnicity, or any other social or cultural factor.

I know when this is read, some of you will be shocked while others will be in some form of denial. Such was the case when I first coined the term “environmental racism” over 30 years ago. But the truth is the truth. And the truth is therapeutic.

Racial and ethnic cleaning at Facebook is the manifestation of digital racism on one of the most powerful social



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Chavis, Jr.

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media platforms in the world. The National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) is opposed to racial and ethnic discrimination. We are alarmed and we resolutely

“The online and digital worlds should not be permissive of racism

join with the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) in demanding that Facebook stop engaging in racially discriminatory practices.

Earlier this month, the CBC sent a letter to Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, concerning this issue.

“We are writing to express our deep concerns with reports that Facebook’s “Ethnic Affinities” advertising customization feature allows for

advertisers to exclude specific racial and ethnic groups when placing housing advertising,” stated the CBC.

The CBC letter was signed by Robin L. Kelly (D-Ill.), Emanuel Cleaver (D-Mo.), Yvette Clarke (D-N.Y.), and G.K. Butterfield (D-N.C., the Chairman of the CBC. Their joint statement concluded, “This is in direct violation of the Fair Housing Act of 1968, and it is our strong desire to see Facebook address this issue immediately.”

The Fair Housing Act of 1968 says it is illegal “to make, print,

publish, or cause to be made, printed, or published any notice, statement, or advertisement, with respect to the sale or rental of a dwelling that indicates any preference, limitation, or discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, or national origin” (42 U.S.C. § 3604). The enactment of the Fair Housing Act of 1968 was a milestone accomplishment of the Civil Rights Movement.

“By allowing online advertisers to promote or market a community or home for the purpose of sale to select an ‘ethnic affinity’ as part of their advertising campaign, Facebook is complicit in promoting restrictive housing practices,” the CBC letter stated. This is clearly a violation of the law.

The NNPA agrees with the CBC. This practice must be stopped immediately.

Today, we all should remain vigilant and committed to stand up and speak out against all instances of racial and ethnic discrimination. Facebook needs to right this wrong. The online and digital worlds should not be permissive of racism.

With all the technological advances to hopefully ensure that the quality of life of all people will ultimately be enhanced in the U.S. and throughout the world, we must strive to identify, call out and stop racism wherever it may arise. Therefore, we call upon Facebook to stop its digital racism and its “Ethnic Affinities” discriminatory program.