

Black Patients & Clinical Trials

Why don't more Black people enroll if offered the chance?

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African-American cancer patients are underrepresented in clinical trials. Why don't more Black people enroll if offered the chance? A distrust in medical research—which is rooted in historically unethical research—and spiritual beliefs may play important roles, according to surveys from two Baltimore medical centers. Findings were presented at the American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO) annual meeting.

Black patients were more than five times more likely to agree with statements that death or illnesses were determined by God's will, and 20% of Black people said they agreed that research harmed minority populations, compared with zero non-Black patients, according to an ASTRO news release. What's more, 33% of Black patients said they felt research would yield details about their health they would rather not know about, and Black people were 10 times more likely than their non-Black peers to say they felt they and their community had nothing to gain from participating in the research. The good news is that 90% of Black and non-Black participants said they trusted their current cancer care team.

"If we want to improve recruitment of underrepresented people in clinical research, we cannot just talk about trial goals," said Charlyn Gomez, lead author of the study and a medical student at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. "We have to look beyond that to understand where the patient is coming from and what their priorities are."
