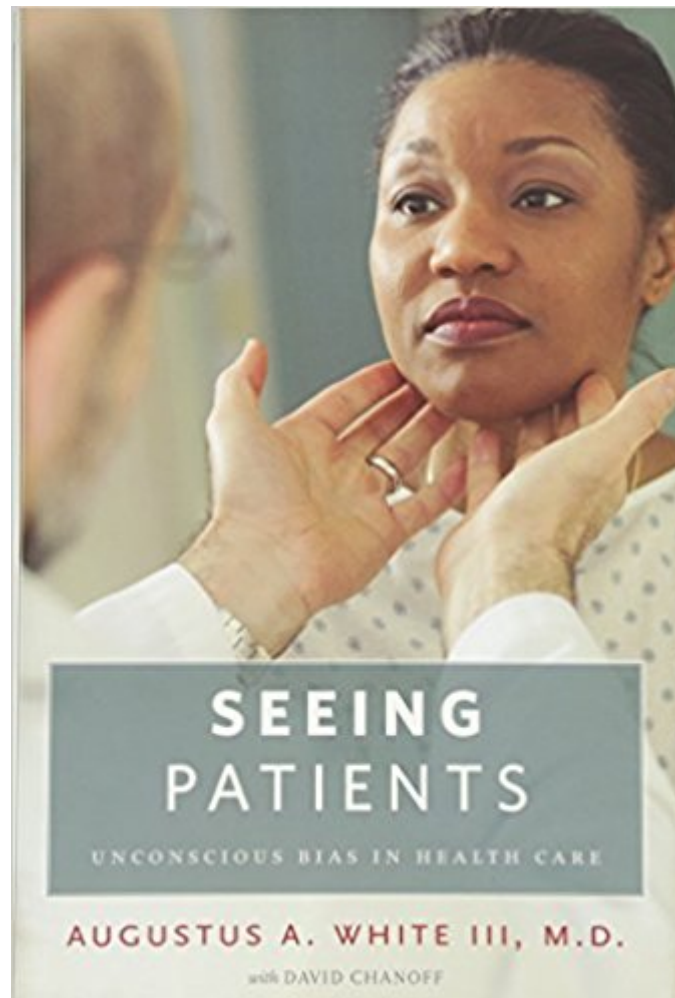


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Seeing Patients: Unconscious Bias In Health Care



Synopsis

If you're going to have a heart attack, an organ transplant, or a joint replacement, here's the key to getting the very best medical care: be a white, straight, middle-class male. This book by a pioneering black surgeon takes on one of the few critically important topics that haven't figured in the heated debate over health care reform—the largely hidden yet massive injustice of bias in medical treatment. Growing up in Jim Crow-era Tennessee and training and teaching in overwhelmingly white medical institutions, Gus White witnessed firsthand how prejudice works in the world of medicine. And while race relations have changed dramatically, old ways of thinking die hard. In *Seeing Patients* White draws upon his experience in startlingly different worlds to make sense of the unconscious bias that riddles medical treatment, and to explore what it means for health care in a diverse twenty-first-century America. White and co-author David Chanoff use extensive research and interviews with leading physicians to show how subconscious stereotyping influences doctor-patient interactions, diagnosis, and treatment. Their book brings together insights from the worlds of social psychology, neuroscience, and clinical practice to define the issues clearly and, most importantly, to outline a concrete approach to fixing this fundamental inequity in the delivery of health care.

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Customer Reviews

When White attended Stanford in the late '50s he was one of four students of color. A recommendation letter written by a mentor then included "this is a pale, colored boy" to avoid

misunderstanding. Now White recounts his ground-breaking life in an engaging, matter-of-fact manner. Eight of the 12 chapters tell his amazing story, from his birth in 1936 in a segregated Memphis (his trailblazing father, a doctor, died when White was only eight), to a 1967 tour of Vietnam wherein White worked in a leprosarium, to a fellowship at a biomechanics lab in Sweden, to his appointment to head a new orthopedic academic program at Harvard. A chance encounter with a woman who felt doctors judged her by her full-body tattoo led White to consider disparities in health care. Challenges exist on both sides of the stethoscope, White argues, noting that the uncertainty felt by many African-American patients over how they will be perceived also impacts the medical encounter; the burden for alleviating racial and other disparities (such as those based in age, gender, and sexual orientation) falls on the medical and educational communities. Accessible, thought-provoking, and valuable. 17 halftones. (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved.

Armed by the unique perspective afforded by being both within the American medical establishment and an African American whose grit and talent put him there, highly respected Harvard Medical School professor White is a crystal-clear visionary. The best means to improve health care for all, he says, is for medical schools to produce physicians who are not only scientifically competent but also equally culturally competent. A culturally competent physician is one who can individuate patients, separating them from the physician's own ingrained racial, religious, gender, or other minority stereotypes. Although many would argue otherwise, study after study has proven that physicians and hospital staff on the whole dispense a lower quality of care to minority patients. Females white and non-white, homosexuals, and the elderly, among other minorities, are also treated differently than white, middle-class males. The result of this poorer quality of care is measurably higher mortality rates among minority populations. Part stirring autobiography, part reasoned apology for egalitarian health care, White's book makes a powerful case.

--Donna Chavez

I am in my 70s and can identify with Dr White's experiences. Being from Haiti I was not prepared for the harsh realities of the White American racism of the early 60s, but like Dr White I managed to persevere and survive. I wish I could have reached the position of power he is in but few physicians, Black or White, will and the advice I would give a fellow Black physician is to be as knowledgeable and competent as he can, be a caring role model and show the young African American, that he or she could also be a successful professional. I still remember a 6 years old black child I was checking for hernia, looking at his mother with disbelief and asking her : "Is he a doctor" ? and the

pride on the mother's face when she answered " yes Honey he is, and one of the best ". We need the "Dr Whites", they are the visible ones but we also need the foot soldiers, the average, competent Black generalist slaving on every city's hospital ward. We need the Super Blacks but we still need thousands of just good ones. The more good minority physicians there are out there, the more defenseless minority patients will benefit from being seen through understanding brotherly and sisterly eyes. One thing Dr White did not mention was a tendency in the 60s and 70s for minority patients to consciently make the choice to go to White surgeons because they did not think minority surgeons were as good as their White counterparts. Projected ingrained feelings for having been looking as inferiors for so many years. I saw that often and it broke my heart. Thank God I noticed a reversal in my later years, when I became well known and a White patient would insist on having me instead of one of the White surgeons on the staff. Yes, Thanks to Dr Augustus White and many unsung Black physicians, better days are coming, at last.

Not what I expected it to be at all by the title. One has to cheer Dr. White for his accomplishments and focus

This is a very useful personal history expanded to the larger issue of healthcare inequality in the US. While not condemning anyone, the book points out the systemic problems we have in the US in recognizing differences among race and socio-economic (class) status.

Dr. White has given us a roadmap for understanding how our own subconscious biases affect how we think and treat others. An accessible AND research-based exploration that includes reflections on his own impressive journey and gives new importance to the critical role cultural competence plays in delivering effective, equitable, dignified medical care.

A candid look into the life of a physician-in-training during segregation and the civil rights movement and how his life experiences influence his practice and teaching today. Should be required reading for all house staff in every training program across the US.

Whether a health care professional or your average citizen, who claims to be without prejudice, this is a provocative book that should cause us all to sit up and take notice and go forth with new sensitivity for all our fellow humans.

Dr. Augustus White III has lived an interesting life, and come out on top. He is a visionary in the field of health-care equality. Lots to think about in his personal story and his professional life. This is a great addition to healthcare literature.

Dr. White's story added compelling information regarding issues of health care for the poor and people of color. It should be required reading for all medical schools/students!

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