

Study: African American men say doctor visits are often a bad experience

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A majority of African American men said they do not go to the doctor because visits are stressful and physicians don't give adequate information on how to make prescribed behavior or lifestyle changes, a new University of Michigan study shows.

When they did go, the majority of the 105 men questioned said they disliked the tone physicians used with them. When those men did visit the doctor, they said it was because they were seeking test results or their family encouraged them to go.

Men often said they knew they needed to lose weight, change eating habits or become more physically active before visiting the doctor. They hoped the doctor would help them figure out how to make those behavioral and lifestyle changes without sacrificing time with spouses and children. The men in the focus groups explained that adopting healthy behaviors was more complex than simple motivation and that doctors didn't understand that a healthier lifestyle meant the men had to give up other meaningful activities.

"That's usually not the story that's told," said Derek Griffith, assistant professor in the U-M School of Public Health and principal investigator of the study. Julie Ober Allen and Katie Gunter of U-M SPH are co-authors.

"Too much emphasis is on the things that African American men don't do, rather than exploring why they don't do them. The reality is that

many men want to adopt healthier lifestyles but face significant challenges beyond [health insurance](#) and the cost of care. They are concerned about their health and are more knowledgeable about the changes they need to make than they are often given credit for," Griffith said.

African American men die an average of seven years earlier than men in other ethnic groups, and are more likely to suffer from undiagnosed [chronic illnesses](#). Overall, African American men have shorter lives than whites and men of other ethnic groups, said Griffith.

In an attempt to understand why African American men don't visit the doctor more often, Griffith and his colleagues at the Center on Men's Health Disparities, housed at the U-M SPH, conducted 14 focus groups with urban, middle-aged [African American men](#) in the Midwest.

The findings highlight the need for physicians to offer practical information, resources and support to help men adhere to medication regimens and make [lifestyle changes](#) within the context of their other responsibilities to family and community, Griffith said. The findings also suggest that understanding these needs may increase men's willingness to go to the doctor and follow to medical recommendations.

More information: rsw.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/08/1049731510388669

Provided by University of Michigan

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