

Physician addresses stigma against patients and providers with disabilities

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Nearly 20 percent of Americans have a disability, yet only 25 percent of medical schools include in their curricula caring for people with disabilities. Numerous reports have documented that people with disabilities have poorer health and receive inferior care.

In a Narrative Matters essay published in *Health Affairs*, Leana Wen, M.D., director of patient-centered care research and assistant professor of emergency medicine at the George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences, shares her own experiences to highlight a major issue in the fight to ensure equitable and accessible [health](#) care for all: adequate treatment of patients with disabilities.

Since nearly every provider will care for substantial numbers of [people with disabilities](#) during his or her career, and may even suffer from disabilities themselves, Wen says it is imperative that future physicians learn to provide better care for these patients.

"As a person who grew up with a disability, I feel a responsibility to speak out against unequal and often insensitive care to patients with disabilities," said Wen. "All of us healthcare providers need to be aware of our own biases in order to serve as advocates for our patients and counter prevalent stigma."

To reduce health disparities and deliver compassionate, equitable care for all [patients](#), Wen calls for medical educators and accreditation councils to ensure that future physicians are trained on core

competencies as it relates to caring for and working with people who have disabilities.

"Developing standardized medical training curriculum, as well as encouraging more providers with disabilities to speak up, can help remedy this situation and lead the way to better care for people with [disabilities](#)," said Wen.

More information: The essay, titled "A Simple Case Of Chest Pain: Sensitizing Doctors To Patients With Disabilities," is published as part of October's issue of *Health Affairs*:

content.healthaffairs.org/content/33/10/1868.full

Provided by George Washington University

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