

Skin of color matters: A call to action



To the Editor: We read Alvarado et al's recent study¹ on the representation of dark skin images of common dermatologic conditions in educational resources with great interest. Cultural competency in health care delivery is fundamental in reducing health care disparities and providing unbiased care. Ultimately, cultural competency will help us connect with our patients and foster a better patient-provider relationship. Although the US population is becoming more diverse, our educational resources continue to lag behind, as evidenced by studies that shed light on the limited representation

of skin of color images in dermatology educational resources.^{1,2} Dermatology as a visual field relies heavily on pictures in textbooks for recognition of diseases, both common and uncommon. Particularly for residents who come from programs in less diverse communities, there is a greater reliance on educational resources with a broad representation of skin of color. Furthermore, there lacks diversity within dermatology academic and residency programs and there is a need for an initiative to create mentorship opportunities for interested students.

The current social justice movement, led in part by Black Lives Matter, is driving us to reflect on our own practices and identify our shortcomings. However, there still lacks a sense of urgency for change, and in

Table I. A call to action

Recognize disparities and biases exist

- Prior studies demonstrated that dermatology textbooks have limited representations of common dermatologic conditions, such as acne vulgaris and pityriasis rosea, in darker skin, while infectious diseases such as syphilis remain well-represented in all skin types²
- Limited representation in core educational resources may lead to missed or delayed diagnoses of conditions by dermatologists in darker-skinned patients
- A prior survey study showed that just 25.4% of chief residents and 19.5% of program directors reported having lectures on skin of color from an acknowledged expert³
- There is a need for increased exposure to skin of color through educational sessions, such as lectures, journal club conferences, and grand rounds presentations during residency.
 - https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Wha9ZF8ba4NXARvwXtopj0Znj0xw3_E2?usp=sharing
 - Please email Dr Hollins at lhollins@pennstatehealth.psu.edu with any questions

Take high-quality images of dark skin

- Photographing skin of color is challenging since the range of tones between normal and pathologic skin is narrow
- New technological developments in digital photography, such as flashless image stabilization, macro mode, and white balance, may eliminate the disparity of ease of imaging darker and lighter skin⁴
- There is a need for access to free training resources in photography, particularly of skin of color patients. This could be achieved through an AAD online learning module
- A group effort should be made for actively and systematically photographing skin of color even for the most common dermatoses

Update dermatology textbooks by integrating skin of color

- There are specialized textbooks focusing on skin of color. However, we propose that skin of color be completely integrated into general textbooks
- As new editions of the most widely read dermatology textbooks are updated, editors must evaluate the textbook's images to determine where an increase representation of skin of color may be needed
- Textbooks should be updated so that there is representation of different shades of skin for each skin disorder, no matter how common
- Involving more experts in skin of color in the authorship of commonly used textbooks may be helpful in highlighting unique racial differences in skin diseases

Increase opportunities to learn about skin of color at annual meetings

- Annual dermatologic meetings, such as the AAD, should hold more skin of color sessions for providers to attend. These opportunities should highlight differences in disease presentation in skin of color

Increase diversity within dermatology academic and residency programs

- The Skin of Color Society details a guide on obtaining a position in a dermatology residency program. One tip suggests locating a mentor through the AAD's Diversity Mentorship Program
 - Program directors, faculty members, and residents should seek opportunities to speak with the Underrepresented in Medicine student group within the medical school and to create mentorship opportunities for its students
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AAD, American Academy of Dermatology.

many instances, the seemingly shortened attention span many of us battle with will make it difficult to keep a spotlight on the important issue of diversity in dermatology. With this in the forefront of our minds, we propose a call to action for every provider—from the trainee to the leaders of dermatology departments everywhere—to make intentional and meaningful changes (Table 1).

We as an institution are also reflecting on our practices and making changes. We will start by updating our dermatology textbook, *Principles of Dermatology*, which is often a resource for medical students and primary care providers, by diversifying our images. In addition, one of the authors (LCH), the Diversity and Inclusion Co-Chair, is incorporating a skin of color lecture into the student curriculum with anticipation of forming a lecture series focused on skin of color. We also hold Diversity and Inclusion Journal Club every 6 months led by one of the authors (LCH). We hope that engaging in discussion about inequities within dermatology when it comes to diversity will help us to become more aware of our inherent biases as we strive to become more culturally competent. In the spirit of collaboration, we include a link to our shared folder from our Diversity and Inclusion Journal Club, with articles that highlight microaggressions, unconscious bias, sexual and gender minorities, and what it means to be an ally (Table 1). Finally, we will ensure that all our residents and faculty are proficient in taking high-quality images in proper lighting, with a goal of having a shared folder representing all the shades of skin. Adhering to our patient-centered values, we pledge to offer solutions, share what we have learned, honor our commitment to diversity, and make dermatology

imagery ever more reflective of our increasingly diverse society.

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Conflicts of interest

None disclosed.

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