

Why African Americans are Hesitant to Donate Blood and Participate in Health Research

There is a great shortage of participation in health research trials and blood donations from African American and minority communities. Minority participation will aid in experimental design and evaluation because it has been shown that there are racial differences in many diseases. There is a lack of willingness of Black participation in donation of tumors and other tissue samples and of blood for controls in health research. The goal of this proposal is to assess the issues that keep African Americans from participating in health research and to increase the education and awareness of the Black community because of the need for African American participation in health research.

Although most clinical trial participants are middle-class Caucasian males, research shows that for many cancers, there are racial differences that influence treatment. These cancers include breast, colo-rectal, prostate, and lung cancers. For instance, Black women have worse breast cancer survival rates than White women. Therefore, it is important to include research participants of various racial groups.

The Tuskegee Syphilis Study demonstrates reasons many Blacks have not willingly participated in health trials. However, many African Americans do not know that one of the major contributors to medical research and public health is Henrietta Lacks who lived in the Turner Station community in Dundalk, Maryland. Henrietta was diagnosed with cervical cancer and some of her cancerous cells were, without her consent, cultured and stored for use in health research. The use of her cells has led to numerous research studies that have saved lives.

The goal of this proposal is to increase the education and awareness of the Black community by administering anonymous surveys in order to understand current perceptions of health research and by providing seminars that present the history of Blacks and their positive and negative experiences with health research.