Forum: World Health Organization

Issue #1: Measures to address ethnic and racial discrimination towards medical professionals

Chairs: Antonella Polini & Juan Pablo Vela

Guiding Questions as you Read

How and why does discrimination affect Medical Professionals?

What are some of the overwhelming effects of discrimination in Medical Professionals?

How does your country monitor and prevent discrimination in healthcare?

Why is systemic discrimination mentioned when taking into account its effect on health?

Introduction

Key Terms

Discrimination
Detrimental consequences
(SDG 10) Sustainable
Development Goal 10

"The latest available data show that close to one in six people globally experience discrimination based on any grounds. Among both women and men, racial discrimination, rooted in factors such as ethnicity, color, or language, is among the most common grounds." ("— SDG Indicators"). Such indicators of inequality affect not only incoming foreigners and locals of diverse races but, most importantly, medical professionals. There have been worldwide cases of physicians who belong to minority groups leaving their jobs due to workplace discrimination and the environment it created. (Nunez-Smith et al.). The overwhelming effects of such discrimination can have detrimental consequences in the medical community. The lack of diversity creates negative work environments in the facilities, which affects the quality and efficiency when treating patients. Moreover, such conditions combined with the lack of diversity from quitting create a close-minded approach to research and overall medical innovation. Addressing the discrimination towards medical professionals can not only enhance the chances of addressing the pressing issues in healthcare but also tackle SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) in an influential discipline such as medicine.

Comprehension Question(s): How does discrimination against minority medical professionals affect healthcare and efforts to reduce inequality?

Definition of Key Terms

Discrimination: The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of ethnicity, age, sex, or disability (Cambridge Dictionary).

Sustainable Development Goal 10 (SDG 10): Focuses on reducing inequality within and among countries, aiming to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of their background or circumstances. It's one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations in 2015 (United Nations).

Systemic Discrimination: Systemic discrimination refers to discriminatory practices, policies, and structures embedded within institutions and systems, leading to unfair and unequal outcomes for certain groups (Ontario Human Rights Commission).

Ethnic Discrimination: Ethnic discrimination refers to treating individuals unfairly or negatively based on their ethnicity or racial background (European Commission).

AMA: The American Medical Association (AMA) is a major professional organization for doctors in the United States. It works to promote the art and science of medicine, improve public health, and support medical professionals (American Medical Association).

WRES: The Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) is a program created by the NHS

in England. It measures how staff from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are treated compared to white staff in the healthcare system (NHS).

Microaggressions: Microaggressions are subtle, often unintentional, verbal or behavioral slights or insults that target a person's race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other identity. These comments or actions may seem harmless on the surface, but can have a cumulative, harmful impact on the individual over time (Merriam-Webster).

Current Situation

Key Terms
Discrimination
Systematic discrimination
Ethical discrimination
Microaggressions
(AMA)
(Wres)

Once, Nelson Mandela said, "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion" (GoodReads). Discrimination is a problem we humans have created and is a problem we humans need to solve for the good of mankind.

Ethnic and Racial discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and culture remains a significant challenge for medical professionals all over the world. According to WenzelFentonCabassa, "Workplace discrimination remains a significant concern in the United States. According to recent data, 61% of U.S. employees have either experienced or witnessed discrimination in their workplace". Several countries have acknowledged the problem and are actively working to address it through policies, training, and political institutions. Countries such as the United States of America, Canada, and Sweden have governmental institutions to prevent discrimination from occurring, including in medical fields. The USA has created numerous organizations to combat ethnic and systemic discrimination among medical professionals. This organization is the American Medical Association (AMA). The United Kingdom has also

created numerous institutions, such as the Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES), which focuses on measuring how Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnicity backgrounds compare to the white staff in the healthcare system, which can result in microaggressions.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

The United States

The United States presents staggering rates of racism, with "up to 40 percent of physicians in the U.S. reported that the health system treats people differently based on their racial or ethnic background" (Gumas et al). Such numbers consider both patients and physicians, and how they are treated in healthcare facilities due to their background. Although the US is a member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, efforts have been made towards equity and to counteract the loss of effectiveness due to systemic discrimination. Connecting to the effect of the deep-rooted issues within the healthcare facilities not allowing general progress and innovation to occur. Most importantly, US history involving the Jim Crow era has made it a country with a very complex history on the issue at hand (Williams and Rucker).

Canada

Canada's geographical location and ethical distribution cause a lot of interaction with indigenous tribes and the modern world. Such interactions come with racism towards both patients and workers of indigenous backgrounds in the health care system. "For example, there was a series of incidents in British Columbia — first reported in June [2020]— in which doctors and nurses played a 'game' to guess the blood alcohol level of Indigenous patients who visited the emergency room, prompting an investigation

and condemnation from Indigenous groups. The game was referred to as "The Price is Right" among staff, with participants trying to guess the exact blood alcohol level of patients." (Rizvic). Regardless, efforts such as the Addressing Racism and Discrimination in Canada's Health Systems Program have been established to target discrimination in healthcare. The strategies in the program include culturally specific accommodations for minorities to get appropriate and adequate help (Canada).

The United Kingdom

The UK's National Health Service (NHS) is commonly known for its groundbreaking research and a wide variety of studies that are accessible to the public. The BMA (British Medical Association) has found several factors pointing towards what is currently holding the system back from avoiding the effects of discrimination on health outcomes. Throughout the years, the NHS has increased the number of doctors from different ethnicities, although surveys and research reveal that they don't feel comfortable in the environment, have lower wages, hold lower grade roles, and are not only harassed by colleagues but also by patients ("Race Inequalities and Ethnic Disparities in Healthcare - Race Equality in Medicine - BMA"). Such treatment has been linked to systemic inequalities and structural racism. Additionally, medical students who are considered ethnic minorities within the UK and foreign students suffer through similar treatment, including harassment and bullying ("Race Inequalities and Ethnic Disparities in Healthcare - Race Equality in Medicine - BMA"). The effect of the discrimination against medical professionals can be seen through staggering numbers such as "Within the healthcare workforce, a shocking 85% of the doctors who died from COVID-19 were from ethnic minority backgrounds." ("Race Inequalities and Ethnic Disparities in Healthcare - Race Equality in Medicine - BMA").

Commonwealth Fund

The Commonwealth Fund has impacted the topic through research on how minority groups are treated, and how they try to handle discrimination in healthcare, with proposed solutions such as education and training on race, discrimination, and racism. ("Commonwealth Fund: Racial, Ethnic Discrimination a Common Problem across Health Care System") Causing an improvement in the overall treatment of both patients and physicians based on race and ethnicity. The Commonwealth Fund has helped raise awareness among policymakers, healthcare leaders, and the public about the prevalence of racial and ethnic discrimination in healthcare.

United Nations Involvement

The United Nations has combated this issue by supporting Sustainable Development Goal 10 (SDG10), which was founded in 2015 and focuses on reducing inequalities between different social groups, migrants, and people with different cultural beliefs, gender, and religion. The United Nations can play a crucial role in addressing ethnic and racial discrimination against medical professionals. The UN can support countries in collecting and analyzing data on workspace inequality through similar tools as the Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES). The UN could publish an annual review highlighting the process and errors in tackling discrimination against health care workers worldwide, with statistics, country rankings, and case studies. The United Nations should also sponsor scholarships, especially for minority students or professionals from low-resource backgrounds, to study and work in international health institutions.

Timeline of Events, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Date	Description of Event
December 1965	The UN General Assembly hosted the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (United Nations, "International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination").
December 1971	300 medical volunteers founded MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders) to "provide care to people facing natural and man-made disasters" ("Our History"). Nowadays, they are a very influential group that helps provide fast responses to crises where medical assistance is required.
March 2016	The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon established the High-Level Commission on Health, Employment, and Economic Growth. The commission is tasked to support and guide the prosperity of the medical job market, especially and low to lower-middle-income countries (World Health Organization). This will hopefully encourage the dismantling of systemic inequalities that cause discrimination and don't allow the commission to fulfill its duty.
March 2020	The COVID-19 pandemic surfaced, raising issues regarding discrimination in health care facilities on a global scale. Causing the UN to further discourage discrimination and clarify guidelines regarding equality (McConnell and Teffera).

| May 2020 | George Floyd's death caused worldwide protests against racism, which resulted in organizations such as the MSF encouraging anti-discrimination measures to be acknowledged ("MSF General Directors Pledge Radical Action to Address Racism"). |

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

The convention aims to eliminate racial and ethnic discrimination in all its forms, affirming all individuals' right to dignity and equality as outlined in the United Nations Charter, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, "International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination"). By emphasizing these principles, the Convention reinforces the idea that all individuals are entitled to enjoy their rights and freedoms without any discrimination based on race, color, or national origin. It mandates immediate and effective measures to prohibit and prevent racial discrimination, by ensuring equal treatment for all people, "Considering that all human beings are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law" (United Nations, "International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination"). Member states are urged to promote understanding and tolerance among different racial and ethnic groups. With the encouragement of diverse organizations and movements that unite individuals and abolish barriers. The convention recognizes that certain racial and ethnic groups require specialized support to achieve equality.

Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

The establishment of a Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, tasked with the monitoring of the implementation of the convention (United Nations, "International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination"). This will be done through the review of reports by member states, addressing complaints, and making recommendations based on the information it receives. By cultivating a collective commitment among nations, the convention aims to create an international community that actively works to combat racial discrimination across all disciplines, including health care (United Nations, "International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination").

Possible Solutions

To address ethnic and racial discrimination towards medical professionals, a possible solution is to launch global campaigns supported by the UN. This campaign would use powerful and meaningful speeches to acknowledge and educate about the discrimination that medical professionals face. The campaign could also include the implementation of an international day for equity in medicine, which would raise awareness among the general public, highlighting the challenges that medical professionals face. By involving worldwide communities, it would normalize conversations about racism in healthcare, therefore allowing an easier way to teach younger generations about this global problem. Another solution is to apply strict policies and legal reforms to protect medical staff from any type of discrimination. To effectively address ethnic and racial discrimination, governments must implement strong and strict anti-discrimination laws within the medical sector. This includes an equal recruitment process, such as blind recruitment, where names and ethnic

identifiers are removed from applications to prevent unconscious bias. Independent bodies or commissions can play a key role in holding institutions accountable, ensuring complaints are investigated fairly and openly.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

The issue relates to UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10, which aims to reduce inequalities within and among countries. The UN believes that achieving equality promotes self-sufficiency and global prosperity. SDG 10 outlines ten targets focused on reducing income gaps, promoting inclusion, ending discrimination, and implementing policies that support equality, especially in developing countries and global financial systems (United Nations). Measures to address ethnic and racial discrimination towards medical professionals aim to support achieving SDG 10. This issue specifically targets workplace discrimination within the medical field. Along with the SDGs, the aim is to protect people's right to equality in any context. The SDG targets the overwhelming consequences of discrimination on the world, as it reflects on how it is stopping the possibility for society to advance and prosper. Meanwhile, discrimination hinders development and prosperity in healthcare by preventing new perspectives from emerging, which are essential to unite people from different backgrounds to make discoveries in the industry. Furthermore, the issue aims to address lost job opportunities in healthcare based on race and ethnicity instead of work experience and overall qualifications.

Useful Links for Research (Appendix)

The appendix is a section providing useful resources for delegates´ research.

https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/

Source A: CIA Factbook: The CIA Factbook provides basic information, but is very detailed about the country, such as your country's population, your country's capital, and other important details.

https://hr.un.org/page/medical-services-around-globe

Source B: UN Medical Services: UN medical services go into detail about the rights that medical professionals have and how they are applied in each country.

https://digitallibrary.un.org/search?ln=en&p=&f=&action_search=Search&rm=&sf=&so=d&rg=50&c=Resource+Type&c=UN+Bodies&c=&of=hb&fti=0&fti=0

Source C: UN Digital Library: The UN Digital Library has information on speeches, resolutions, and statements that many countries have made in the UN.

Bibliography

American Medical Association. "American Medical Association | About us." AMA,
        https://www.ama-assn.org/about. Accessed 30 June 2025.

Cambridge Dictionary. "DISCRIMINATION | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary."
        Cambridge Dictionary, 25 June 2025,
        https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/discrimination. Accessed 30
        June 2025.

Canada, Health. "Addressing Racism and Discrimination in Canada's Health Systems

Program – What We Do." *Www.canada.ca*, 6 Apr. 2022,

www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/corporate/about-health-canada/funding/

addressing-racism-discrimination-canada-health-systems-program.html.

"Commonwealth Fund: Racial, Ethnic Discrimination a Common Problem across Health

Care System." *Risehealth.org*, 2025,

www.risehealth.org/insights-articles/commonwealth-fund-racial-ethnic-discrimina

tion-a-common-problem-across-health-care-system/. Accessed 26 Apr. 2025.

Council of Europe. "Tackling Racism and Intolerance in the Area of Health Care."

Division on Migration and Refugees, Council of Europe, 17 June 2024,

www.coe.int/en/web/migration-and-refugees/-/tackling-racism-and-intolerance

-in-the-area-of-health-care. Accessed 3 May 2025.

"Employment Discrimination Statistics in 2022." *Wenzel Fenton Cabassa, P.A.*, 18 July

2022,

www.wenzelfenton.com/blog/2022/07/18/employment-discrimination-statistics-e

mployees-need-to-know/?utm_. Accessed 10 May 2025.

"Ethics Talk: Supported Decision Making for Persons with Disabilities - an Interview with

Susan Mizner." *AMA Journal of Ethics*, American Medical Association, Apr. 2016,

journalofethics.ama-assn.org/podcast/ethics-talk-supported-decision-making-pe

rsons-disabilities-interview-susan-mizner. Accessed 10 May 2025.

"Excellence through Equality." *NHS Confederation*, 2021,

www.nhsconfed.org/publications/excellence-through-equality. Accessed 26

Apr. 2025.

"Goal 10 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs." *Un.org*, 2023,

sdgs.un.org/goals/goal10. Accessed 10 May 2025.

Gumas, Evan D, et al. "Health Care Workers in Canada, the U.K., and the U.S. Report

  Racial and Ethnic Discrimination in the Health Care System."

  Commonwealthfund.org, 27 Jan. 2025,

  www.commonwealthfund.org/blog/2025/health-care-workers-canada-uk-and-u

  s-report-racial-and-ethnic-discrimination-health-care,

  https://doi.org/10.26099/vnmm-er89. Accessed 25 Apr. 2025.

McConnell, Matt, and Almaz Teffera. "Governments Need to Guarantee Health Care

  without Racism." *Human Rights Watch*, 23 Sept. 2024,

  www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/23/governments-need-guarantee-health-care-with

  out-racism.

Merriam-Webster. "MICROAGGRESSION Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster,

  https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/microaggression. Accessed 30

  June 2025.

"MSF General Directors Pledge Radical Action to Address Racism." *Doctors without

  Borders - USA*, 2020,

  www.doctorswithoutborders.org/msf-general-directors-pledge-radical-action-ad

  dress-racism. Accessed 3 May 2025.

Nations, United. "Human Rights | United Nations." *United Nations*, 2024,

  www.un.org/en/global-issues/human-rights. Accessed 24 Apr. 2025.

NHS England. "NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard." *NHS England*, 2023,

  www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/workforce-equality-data-stan

  dards/equality-standard/.

Nunez-Smith, Marcella, et al. "Health Care Workplace Discrimination and Physician

  Turnover." *Journal of the National Medical Association*, vol. 101, no. 12, 2009, pp.

1274–82, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3833271/,

https://doi.org/10.1016/s0027-9684(15)31139-1.

Ontario Human Rights Commission. "Racism and racial discrimination: Systemic

discrimination (fact sheet)." Ontario Human Rights Commission,

https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/en/racism-and-racial-discrimination-systemic-discrimin

ation-fact-sheet. Accessed 30 June 2025.

"Our History." *Médecins sans Frontières(MSF)/Doctors without Borders*,

msfsouthasia.org/our-history/.

"Race Inequalities and Ethnic Disparities in Healthcare - Race Equality in Medicine -

BMA." *The British Medical Association Is the Trade Union and Professional Body for

Doctors in the UK.*, 2021,

www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/equality-and-diversity-guidance/race-eq

uality-in-medicine/race-inequalities-and-ethnic-disparities-in-healthcare.

Accessed 26 Apr. 2025.

Rizvic, Sejla. "Racism in Canada's Health-Care System Was a Risk to BIPOC Canadians

before COVID-19 - Institute for Canadian Citizenship." *Institute for Canadian

Citizenship*, 14 Nov. 2022,

forcitizenship.ca/article/racism-in-canadas-health-care-system-was-a-risk-to-bipo

c-canadians-before-covid-19/.

United Nations. "— SDG Indicators." *Unstats.un.org*, 2022,

unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/Goal-10/.

---. "Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities." *The Global Goals*, 2025,

www.globalgoals.org/goals/10-reduced-inequalities/.

---. "International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination."

OHCHR, United Nations, 21 Dec. 1965,

www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-conventio
n-elimination-all-forms-racial.

---. "OHCHR | Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination." *OHCHR*, 2024,
www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cerd.

WenzelFentonCabassa. "2023 Employment Discrimination Statistics Employees Need to
Know." WenzelFentonCabassa | Employee Rights Attorneys, June 2023,
https://www.wenzelfenton.com/blog/2022/07/18/employment-discrimination-sta
tistics-employees-need-to-know/?utm_. Accessed 30 June 2025.

WHO. "Joint United Nations Statement on Ending Discrimination in Health Care
Settings." *Www.who.int*, 27 June 2017,
www.who.int/news/item/27-06-2017-joint-united-nations-statement-on-ending-dis
crimination-in-health-care-settings.

Williams, David R, and Toni D Rucker. "Understanding and Addressing Racial Disparities
in Health Care." *Health Care Financing Review*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2014, p. 75,
pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4194634/.

World Health Organisation. "Working for Health and Growth: Investing in the Health
Workforce." *Www.who.int*, 2016,
www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241511308.

Goodreads.com, 2025. Accessed 10 May 2025