

The Need for Basic Science: An Editorial

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Recently demonstrations were held in Washington DC, not by disgruntled minorities, abortion rights activists, the homeless, or labor protestors, but by scientists, mostly academicians. Their fear is that the change in the federal administration because of the past election may be a harbinger of a cutback in governmental support for scientific research. Their concerns have important implications for medical treatment. American medicine is evidence based and as much as possible develop the understanding of disease states from basic science. The irony is that the translation of basic science to medical interventions and improve health care has become faster and more consistent but the impact on the health care of ethnic minorities may now be lessened.

Recognition of ethnic differences in morbidity and mortality are now widely known. African Americans and Latinos consistently show greater disease burden, health care outcomes, and more disease burden in many disease

states. The differences are often attributed to socioeconomic status and access to care. But the argument can be made that some of the disparities are a result of lack of access to the advance seen in medical technology. Often African Americans are less likely to get access to new treatments which may be more effective or safer. Lack of support for basic research could limit new treatment advances that would be especially more advantageous to ethnic minorities.

Research in the United States is invariably investigator initiated. However minority researchers are rare. All other things being equal they are less likely to get grant funding. Disease states more common or with worse outcomes in Americans American may be less studied. Ethnic minorities are certainly underrepresented in clinical trials, which could contribute to reducing knowledge gaps in treatment. Limited scientific resources be as important as the increased focus on social equity as contributors to health disparities.

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