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Health disparities in acute outcomes of life-threatening injury: Potential mechanisms and implications for nursing practice and research

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Abstract

The Institute of Medicine report "Unequal Treatment" outlines health disparities among racial and ethnic minorities in the United States for nearly all commonly known chronic diseases, yet an assessment of health disparities for these populations within acute outcomes of trauma, defined here as life-threatening injury(ies), is noticeably absent. Acute outcomes of trauma with the highest morbidity and mortality rates have the inflammatory response to injury as a common pathogenic denominator. Recent research conducted by the Trauma Interdisciplinary Group for Research (TIGR) suggests that differences may exist in the inflammatory response to trauma for racial and ethnic minorities. Theoretical support from psychoneuroimmunology and the Vulnerable Populations Conceptual Framework suggests that these differences may be a result of chronic stress from a lack of human social and political capital. The purpose of this presentation is to report preliminary findings from a study funded by the National Institute of Nursing Research which aimed (in part) to determine if chronic stress is a significant predisposing factor contributing to increased baseline inflammation and decreased magnitude of the inflammatory response to trauma, and to connect these findings to previous TIGR research and theoretical underpinnings which may explain the results. Implications for practice and research will focus on applying this data to support evidence based practice and tailored assessments for early prevention and treatment of trauma patients within the emergency and critical care settings.

Biography

Elizabeth NeSmith is an Associate Professor at Georgia Regents University and has nearly 25 years of experience in trauma, emergency, and disaster nursing. She is currently the Director of the Ph.D. program within the College of Nursing at Georgia Regents University and co-founded TIGR along with her colleague and co-author of this report, Dr. Regina Medeiros. She obtained her Ph.D. with a focus on translational and interdisciplinary research. Her federally funded grants, publications, and international presentations focus on health disparities for acute outcomes of trauma, particularly those related to chronic stress and complications of trauma with inflammatory origins. She is also an Acute Care Nurse Practitioner and applies her skills to research-focused role implementation in collaboration with her clinical and scientific partners within the Level 1 trauma center at her institution.

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