

The Effect of Conversation Unrelated to Medical Topics in Racially Discordant Medical Interactions

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Abstract: Much recent research on patients and physicians interactions has shown that patient perceptions' of their physicians may be enhanced by the physicians' encouragement of the patient to play a more active role in their care. Overall, patients involved in racially discordant medical interactions have poorer perceptions of their physicians than those participating in racially concordant medical interactions. The purpose of this study was to determine if the presence of conversation unrelated to medical topics (small talk) resulted in improved perceptions of the physician by the patient in racially discordant medical interactions. It was discovered in a secondary analysis of 135 racially discordant medical interactions between Black patients and non-Black physicians that patients who engaged in small talk reported more positive perceptions of their physicians. Those who did not engage in any small talk reported less positive perceptions of their physician. It may be that increasing "small talk" in racially discordant medical interactions will improve patient perceptions of their physicians, thereby, possibly enhancing active involvement of the patient.