

HEALTH

Study: Blacks, women, poor face barriers to transplants

By Lindsey Tanner
 CHICAGO (AP) — Blacks, women and poor people with kidney failure are much less likely to complete preliminary steps required before they can receive an organ transplant, researchers report.

A consumer advocacy group calls the study in Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association proof that the U.S. health care system discriminates, but the authors say there likely are other reasons for the disparity.

It has long been known that the three groups are under-represented among kidney transplant recipients, but efforts to resolve the problem have focused on

"trying to increase organ donation or on how to change the way we allocate" donated organs, said Dr. Ashwini R. Sehgal, co-author and a nephrologist at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

"All that will only help people already on the waiting list," he said. "We wanted to see what happens before patients get to the waiting list."

The authors studied 7,125 kidney-dialysis patients between January 1993 and December 1996 in Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio. They examined the number who completed each of four steps leading up to receiving a transplant: being medically suitable and possibly

interested; deciding to definitely seek transplant; preoperation workup completed and referred by surgeon to waiting list; moved up waiting list and received a transplant.

Compared with whites, blacks were 32 percent to 50 percent less likely to complete the last three steps. Compared with wealthy people, poor patients were 22 percent to 33 percent less likely to complete the first three steps, though those who did were just as likely to receive transplants. Compared with men, women were up to 12 percent less likely to complete all four steps.

"Our findings indicate that efforts to allocate kidneys more equitably must target

each step in the transplantation process," the authors wrote in the journal.

Typically, patients with kidney failure first are put on dialysis, usually involving several visits a week to an outpatient facility. Kidney transplants generally offer longer life span, better quality of life and lower overall costs, though some patients are unsuitable because of underlying medical conditions.

Medicare covers virtually all dialysis and transplant costs for patients regardless of age, though coverage expires for those younger than 65 three years after the transplant is received, Sehgal said.

Medicare requires dialysis

providersto discuss treatment options with patients at least annually, and to report that information to regional agencies that monitor transplant eligibility and status, the authors said.

Though the authors did not examine reasons keeping blacks, women and the poor from completing the process, there are numerous possibilities, including a lack of uniformity among the agencies' ranking systems, Sehgal said.

These patients may be more likely to have medical conditions that need to be treated before a transplant can be done, or conditions that would make them unsuitable for transplants.

They may also be less

interested in receiving a transplant, or concerned about losing Medicare coverage after the operation.

Public Citizen, a consumer advocacy group, says bias is to blame.

"This study exposes just how discriminatory the U.S. health care system can be," said Dr. Peter Lurie, a medical researcher for the group. "These shameful biases in American medicine must be eliminated by, for example, using case managers to help African-Americans, women and the poor navigate the system more efficiently."

But, responded Sehgal, "I really can't say based on the study that there is or there isn't discrimination going on."

Jesse Jackson calls for America to address black lung disease

By Kimberly Hefling
 PIKEVILLE, Ky. (AP)— While politicians in Washington were occupied with President Clinton's legal problems, the Rev. Jesse Jackson toured Appalachia to discuss health care and jobs. Jackson, speaking two

weeks ago at a black lung rally outside the United Mine Workers of America office in Pikeville, said the people of Appalachia have been forgotten. Black lung disease, he said, is one regional issue that's been ignored by the nation's politicians and must

be addressed to save lives.

"If we have the resources to help bail out China and Russia and Japan, it's our turn, we can help out Mud Creek, Ky., Ohio, and West Virginia," said Jackson. "This land is our land."

When poverty exists in

foreign lands, Jackson said Americans blame the governmental structure for the people's problems, but when it comes to Appalachia, he said Americans blame the people instead of working to correct the system.

Using several biblical

allusions and scripture, Jackson encouraged those in attendance to be strong. He said capital must be brought into Appalachia with programs set up similar to those that the United States puts in place in other countries.

"You have a right to the American tree of life," Jackson said. "We have a mighty obligation to leave no American behind."

While America has debated the issue of tobacco and the effects of secondhand (See Lung Disease, Page 19)

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SOME IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER FOR THE NOVEMBER 3 GENERAL ELECTION:

Early Voting:	OCT. 17-30
Election Day (at polling place):	NOV. 3

PERMANENT EARLY VOTING SITES:

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| Belz Factory Outlet World | 7400 Las Vegas Blvd., Las Vegas |
| Boulevard Mall | 3528 S. Maryland Pkwy., Las Vegas |
| Clark County Govt. Center | 500 Grand Central Pkwy., Las Vegas |
| Fashion Show Mall | 3200 Las Vegas Blvd. S., Las Vegas |
| Galleria Mall | 1300 W. Sunset Road, Henderson |
| Meadows Mall | 4300 Meadows Lane, Las Vegas |