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COMMENTARY

## Confronting Healthcare Disparities in Internal Medicine: A Critical Call to Action

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### DESCRIPTION

Healthcare disparities, defined as differences in health outcomes and access to care among different population groups, are a significant concern in the field of internal medicine. These disparities are often driven by a complex interplay of social, economic, and environmental factors, leading to unequal care and health outcomes. Internal medicine, with its focus on adult health and chronic disease management, is uniquely positioned to address and mitigate these disparities through targeted interventions and systemic changes. Healthcare disparities can manifest in various forms, including differences in disease prevalence, mortality rates, access to care, and quality of care among different racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and geographic groups. For instance, studies have shown that African Americans and Hispanics are more likely to suffer from chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease compared to their white counterparts. These populations also experience higher mortality rates and poorer health outcomes due to barriers in accessing timely and adequate healthcare. Several factors contribute to healthcare disparities, including social determinants of health, such as income, education, employment, and housing. Additionally, systemic issues within the healthcare system, such as implicit bias, discrimination, and lack of cultural competence among healthcare providers, exacerbate these disparities. For instance, African American patients with hypertension are less likely to receive guideline-concordant care and more likely to experience uncontrolled blood pressure compared to white patients. This disparity results in higher rates of complications, such as stroke and kidney disease, among African Americans. To address healthcare disparities in internal medicine, a multifaceted approach is necessary. This involves addressing both systemic issues within the healthcare system and broader social determinants of health. Improving access to care is crucial in reducing healthcare disparities. This can be achieved by expanding insurance coverage, increasing the availability of community health centres, and providing transportation services for patients in

underserved areas. Telemedicine offers a promising solution by providing remote consultations and follow-up care, particularly for patients in rural or medically underserved areas. Addressing the social determinants of health requires collaboration between healthcare providers, policymakers, and community organizations. Initiatives that provide support for housing, education, and employment can improve overall health outcomes. For instance, programs that assist low-income patients with securing stable housing and access to nutritious food can significantly impact their ability to manage chronic conditions. Implicit bias training for healthcare providers is critical in reducing disparities in care. By recognizing and addressing their own biases, providers can offer more equitable care. Additionally, implementing standardized protocols and guidelines can help ensure that all patients receive consistent, evidence-based care regardless of their background. Engaging with communities to understand their unique needs and challenges is vital in addressing healthcare disparities. Healthcare providers can partner with community organizations to develop targeted interventions and outreach programs. Advocacy efforts at the local, state, and national levels are also necessary to promote policies that address healthcare inequities. Addressing these disparities requires a comprehensive approach that includes enhancing access to care, providing culturally competent care, addressing social determinants of health, reducing implicit bias, and engaging with communities. By prioritizing these efforts, internal medicine practitioners can play a pivotal role in reducing healthcare disparities and ensuring equitable care for all patients. As the healthcare landscape continues to evolve, a steadfast commitment to addressing healthcare disparities will be essential in achieving better health outcomes and promoting social justice in healthcare.

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### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.