

MLK Day Special: Dismantling Racism in Medicine

featuring

Uché Blackstock, MD

[Advancing Health Equity](#)



This time on Code WACK!

In honor of **Martin Luther King Jr.'s** legacy of equality and justice for all, we welcome **Dr. Uché Blackstock**, author of the **New York Times** bestselling book **“Legacy: A Black Physician Reckons with Racism in Medicine.”**

Trained as an ER physician, the Harvard Medical School graduate is founder and CEO of **[Advancing Health Equity](#)**, an organization that aims to dismantle racism in healthcare and narrow health inequities.

Check out the [Transcript](#) and Show Notes for more!

SHOW NOTES

WE DISCUSS

Welcome, Dr. Blackstock! Tell us about yourself. Why did you decide to become a physician?

“Oh, so that's pretty easy. My mother, the original Dr. Blackstock, was a physician and she was my role model...”

“...I am a board-certified emergency medicine physician by training, and right now I no longer practice, but I am the founder and CEO of Advancing Health Equity, which is a strategic health equity consulting firm. We partner with health-related organizations to address racial health inequities, and I'm also the author of **“Legacy: A Black Physician Reckons with Racism in Medicine.”** – ***Uché Blackstock, MD***

When did you become aware of racism in medicine?

“Yeah, it's interesting because I feel like I was sort of on a journey, you know, from child to medical student to practicing physician.

“You know, I did have this experience when I was in medical school, first year medical student where I had a missed appendicitis. So I ended up having my appendix rupture and it really wasn't until many years later when I was a practicing physician that I wondered if, *because of who I was*, you know, as a young Black woman, that I wasn't taken as seriously....I was in my mid twenties. And in retrospect I wondered, *was I being treated a certain way because I was a Black woman?*

“But, you know, it wasn't really until I was in residency at Kings County Hospital, which is a public hospital in Brooklyn, that I began to really see it ... in my patients. It was mostly a working class black neighborhood. Their health outcomes really were not related to individual decisions that they made, but more what was happening on a community level, the legacy of, you know, systemic racism contemporarily and seeing how that impacted their health.” – ***Uché Blackstock, MD***

How does it affect Black patients when their concerns are dismissed and their pain undertreated?

“... I think what's very important to understand is that, you know, when pain is not adequately treated, people most likely have an underlying diagnosis that's being missed. So it's not just about not treating the pain, which actually can cause psychological harm, physical harm, just that experiencing pain. And that actually is associated with people having emotional and psychological distress.

“But the other piece is that often when pain is not adequately treated, there's not a further investigation of why that person is having pain. Kind of like in my situation, you know, with appendicitis.

“And so what we see are missed and delayed diagnosis and sometimes even resulting in harm and death. One of the examples I give is like thinking about, you know, the high maternal mortality rate in this country. It has to do with systemic issues, but also what happens on an interpersonal level between clinicians and patients. And when patients are saying, ‘I'm having this discomfort,’ or ‘something is happening that doesn't feel right,’ they're not being listened to.” - ***Uché Blackstock, MD***

Helpful Links

[Legacy: A Black Physician Reckons with Racism in Medicine](#), *Uché Blackstock, MD*

[Little Progress Has Been Made in Closing Racial and Ethnic Gaps in U.S. Health Care; Federal Government Should Act to Fix Structural Inequities](#), *The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*

[Lived Experiences of Racism and Patient-Clinician Communication Among Black Adults With Serious Illnesses](#), *National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities*

[Beyoncé, Serena Williams bring attention to risks of childbirth for black women](#), *CNN*

[Racial Disparities in Maternal and Infant Health: Current Status and Efforts to Address Them](#), *KFF*

Episode Transcript

Read the episode transcript.

Guest Biography - Uché Blackstock, MD

Dr. Uché Blackstock is a physician and thought leader on bias and racism in health care.

She is the founder and CEO of [Advancing Health Equity](#), appears regularly on MSNBC and NBC News, and is a former associate professor in the Department of Emergency Medicine and the former faculty director for recruitment, retention, and inclusion in the Office of Diversity Affairs at NYU School of Medicine.

Dr. Blackstock received both her undergraduate and medical degrees from Harvard University, making her and her twin sister, Oni, the first Black mother-daughter legacies from Harvard Medical School. Dr. Blackstock currently lives in her hometown of Brooklyn, New York, with her two school-age children.

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