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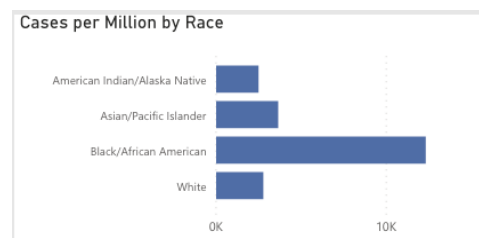
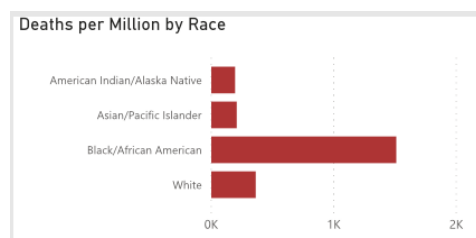
Dear Chairman Neal and House Ways and Means Committee,

I am a primary care physician in a community outside of Detroit, Michigan. I am writing to provide on-the-ground evidence that COVID19 is disproportionately impacting African American populations in my community. This fact has been most vivid for me in conversations with my patients. At one point, I referred to COVID19 to an African American patient. “We’re lucky that we haven’t been impacted as heavily as Detroit,” I said.

He responded: “What do you mean? Six members of my family have already died. It’s everywhere. We’re dropping like flies.”

I was blown away by this, and asked why he thought this was. He said, “Everyone in my family is an ‘essential worker,’ which so far just means that their lives aren’t worth more than their jobs. Is a janitor really essential? Or just expendable? Doctors work remotely doing video visits from home, but their assistants and receptionists have to go into the office. And how can we socially isolate if we don’t live in big houses in the suburbs?”

My patient’s experiences have been the rule, not the exception, in my conversations with my African American patients. Here are two tables from Michigan.gov coronavirus webpage (<https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus/>), captured today, that illustrate the population-scale view of what my patients are telling me:



As my patient pointed out, it is also clear that this effect is due to structural racism and racialized capitalism. I implore the House Ways and Means Committee to treat today as a vitally imperative moment to fix such structures. If we do not, many more people of color are likely to die in the near future.

There are many angles with which to approach this issue. Given the current moment of political protests, it is important to note that a country that disproportionately incarcerates (and hyper-incarcerates) African Americans also puts them at severely increased risk of infection and death during a pandemic, which in many ways constitutes cruel and unusual punishment. Does a minor felony warrant death as a punishment? I encourage the Committee to consider decriminalization of minor offenses (especially drug possession offenses) as a public health measure in this critical and fatal time.

An additional target would be the structure of healthcare, which is currently divided geographically through a fee-for-service profit-oriented model that has created an embarrassingly mis-coordinated response to COVID19. Hospitals literally across the street from one another have had wildly different resources to handle the crisis, and the under-resourced hospitals have taken care disproportionately of populations of color. This is part of a broader trend of poor-quality care delivered to communities most in need. For a clinical example of this, I often refer to the short, readable article in the New England Journal of Medicine: “Structural Racism — A 60-Year-Old Black Woman with Breast Cancer” by Pallok, et al.

I am very grateful to the Committee for creating a venue for community input, and I sincerely hope that this turns into action on the fundamental structures that are causing this inequity.

Sincerely,

Scott Stonington