

# Diversity in Dermatology: A Society Devoted to Skin of Color

This column is the first in a series of Skin of Color articles that will be produced in collaboration with the Skin of Color Society.

See page 308 for the editorial note.

Jacob Subash, BS; Rechelle Tull, BS; Amy McMichael, MD

## PRACTICE POINTS

- The mission of the Skin of Color Society (SOCS) is to improve education of young dermatologists relevant to skin of color patients.
- Educational resources on many different diseases important to patients with skin of color are available to patients and providers on the SOCS website.

*The US Census Bureau predicts that more than half of the country's population will identify as a race other than non-Hispanic white by the year 2044. Racial disparities also exist in the physician population where black individuals and Latinos are underrepresented. The Skin of Color Society (SOCS) was established to address the need for parity among dermatology patients with skin of color. The society provides educational support on dermatologic health related to skin of color and functions through committees that represent the multifaceted aspects of the organization. This column highlights the ongoing efforts of SOCS and its impact since its inception. We also chronicle the society's approach to broadening the scope of the specialty of dermatology.*

*Cutis.* 2017;99:322-324.

The US Census Bureau predicts that more than half of the country's population will identify as a race other than non-Hispanic white by the year 2044. In 2014, the US population was 62.2% non-Hispanic white, and the projected figure for 2060 is 43.6%.<sup>1</sup> However, most physicians currently are informed by research that is generalized from a study population of primarily white males.<sup>2</sup> Disparities also exist among the physician population where black individuals and Latinos are underrepresented.<sup>3</sup> These differences have inspired dermatologists to develop methods to address the need for parity among patients with skin of color. Both ethnic skin centers and the Skin of Color Society (SOCS) have been established since the turn of the millennium to improve disparities and prepare for the future. The efforts and impact of SOCS are widening since its inception and chronicle one approach to broadening the scope of the specialty of dermatology.

Established in 2004 by dermatologist Susan C. Taylor, MD (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), SOCS provides educational support to health care providers, the media, the legislature, third parties (eg, insurance organizations), and the general public on dermatologic health for patients with skin of color. The society is organized into committees that represent the multifaceted aspects of the organization. It also stimulates and endorses an increase

---

From the Department of Dermatology, Wake Forest University School of Medicine, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Mr. Subash and Ms. Tull report no conflict of interest. Dr. McMichael is the immediate past president of the Skin of Color Society.

Correspondence: Amy McMichael, MD, 4618 Country Club Rd, Department of Dermatology, Wake Forest Baptist Health Medical Center, Winston-Salem, NC 27104 (amcmicha@wakehealth.edu).

in scientific knowledge through basic science and clinical, surgical, and cosmetic research.<sup>4</sup>

Scientific, research, mentorship, professional development, national and international outreach, patient education, and technology and media committees within SOCS, as well as a newly formed diversity in action task force, uphold the mission of the society. The scientific committee, one of the organization's major committees, plans the annual symposium. The annual symposium, which immediately precedes the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Dermatology, acts as a central educational symposium for dermatologists (both domestic and international), residents, students, and other scientists to present data on unique properties, statistics, and diseases associated with individuals with ethnic skin. New research, perspectives, and interests are shared with an audience of physicians, research fellows, residents, and students who are also the presenters of topics relevant to skin of color such as cutaneous T-cell lymphomas/mycosis fungoides in black individuals, central centrifugal cicatricial alopecia (CCCA), pigmentary disorders in Brazilians, and many others. There is an emphasis on allowing learners to present their research in a comfortable and constructive setting, and these shorter talks are interspersed with experts who deliver cutting-edge lectures in their specialty area.<sup>4</sup>

Each year during the SOCS symposium, the SOCS Research Award is endowed to a dermatology resident, fellow, or young dermatologist within the first 8 years of postgraduate training. The research committee oversees the selection of the SOCS Research Award. Prior recipients of the award have explored topics such as genetic causes of keloid formation or CCCA, epigenetic changes in ethnic skin during skin aging, and development of a vitiligo-specific quality-of-life scale.<sup>4</sup>

Another key mission of SOCS is to foster the growth of younger dermatologists interested in skin of color via mentorships; SOCS has a mentorship committee dedicated to engaging in this effort. Dermatology residents or young dermatologists who are within 3 years of finishing residency can work with a SOCS-approved mentor to develop knowledge, skills, and networking in the skin of color realm. Research is encouraged, and 3 to 4 professional development meetings (both in person or online) help set objectives. The professional development committee also coordinates efforts to offer young dermatologists opportunities to work with experienced mentors and further partnerships with existing members.<sup>4</sup>

The national and international outreach committee acts as a liaison between organizations

abroad and those based in the United States. The patient education committee strives to improve public knowledge about dermatologic diseases that affect individuals with skin of color. Ethnic patients often have poor access to medical information, and sometimes adequate medical information does not exist in the current searchable medical literature. The SOCS website (<http://skinofcolorsociety.org/>) offers an entire section on dermatology education with succinct, patient-friendly prose on diseases such as acne in skin of color, CCCA, eczema, melanoma, melasma, sun protection, tinea capitis, and more; the website also includes educational videos, blogs, and a central location for useful links to other dermatology organizations that may be of interest to both members and patients who use the site. Maintenance of the website and the SOCS media day fall under the purview of the technology and media committee. There have been 2 media days thus far that have given voice to sun safety and skin cancer in individuals with skin of color as well as hair health and cosmetic treatments for patients with pigmented skin. The content for the media days is provided by SOCS experts to national magazine editors and beauty bloggers to raise awareness about these issues and get the message to the public.<sup>4</sup>

The diversity in action task force is a new committee that is tasked with addressing training for individuals of diverse ethnicities and backgrounds for health care careers at every level, ranging from middle school to dermatology residency. Resources to help those applying to medical school and current medical students interested in dermatology as well as those applying for dermatology residency are being developed for students at all stages of their academic careers. The middle school to undergraduate educational levels will encompass general guidelines for success; the medical school level will focus on students taking the appropriate steps to enter dermatology residency. The task force also will act as a liaison through existing student groups, such as the Student National Medical Association, Minority Association of Premedical Students, Latino Medical Student Association, Dermatology Interest Group Association, and more to reach learners at critical stages in their academic development.<sup>4</sup>

The society plays an important role in the educational process for dermatologists at all levels. Although this organization is critical in increasing knowledge of treatment of individuals with skin of color in research, clinical practice, and the public domain, the hope is that SOCS will continue to reach new members of the dermatology community.

As a group that embraces the onus to improve skin of color education, the members of SOCS know that there is still much to do to increase awareness among the public as well as dermatology residents and dermatologists practicing in geographical regions that are not ethnically diverse. There are many reasons that both cultural competence and knowledge of skin of color in dermatology will be important as the United States becomes increasingly diverse, and SOCS is at the forefront of this effort. Looking to the future, the goals of SOCS really are the goals of dermatology, which are to continue to deliver the best care to all patients and to continue to improve our specialty with new techniques and medications for all patients who need care.

## REFERENCES

1. Colby SL, Jennifer JO. *Projections of the Size and Composition of the U.S. Population: 2014 to 2060*. Washington, DC: US Census Bureau; 2014.
2. Oh SS, Galanter J, Thakur N, et al. Diversity in clinical and biomedical research: a promise yet to be fulfilled. *PLoS Med*. 2015;12:e1001918.
3. Castillo-Page L. Diversity in the physician workforce facts & figures 2010. Washington, DC: Association of American Medical Colleges; 2010. <https://www.aamc.org/download/432976/data/factsandfigures2010.pdf>. Accessed April 12, 2017.
4. Our committees. Skin of Color Society website. <http://skinofcolorsociety.org/about-socs/our-committees/>. Accessed April 19, 2017.