

Understanding the History of Racism in Obstetrics and Gynecology –

The Necessary Work to End Disparities in Women's Health

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Maternal-Fetal Medicine Attending

Disparities in Obstetric and Gynecology

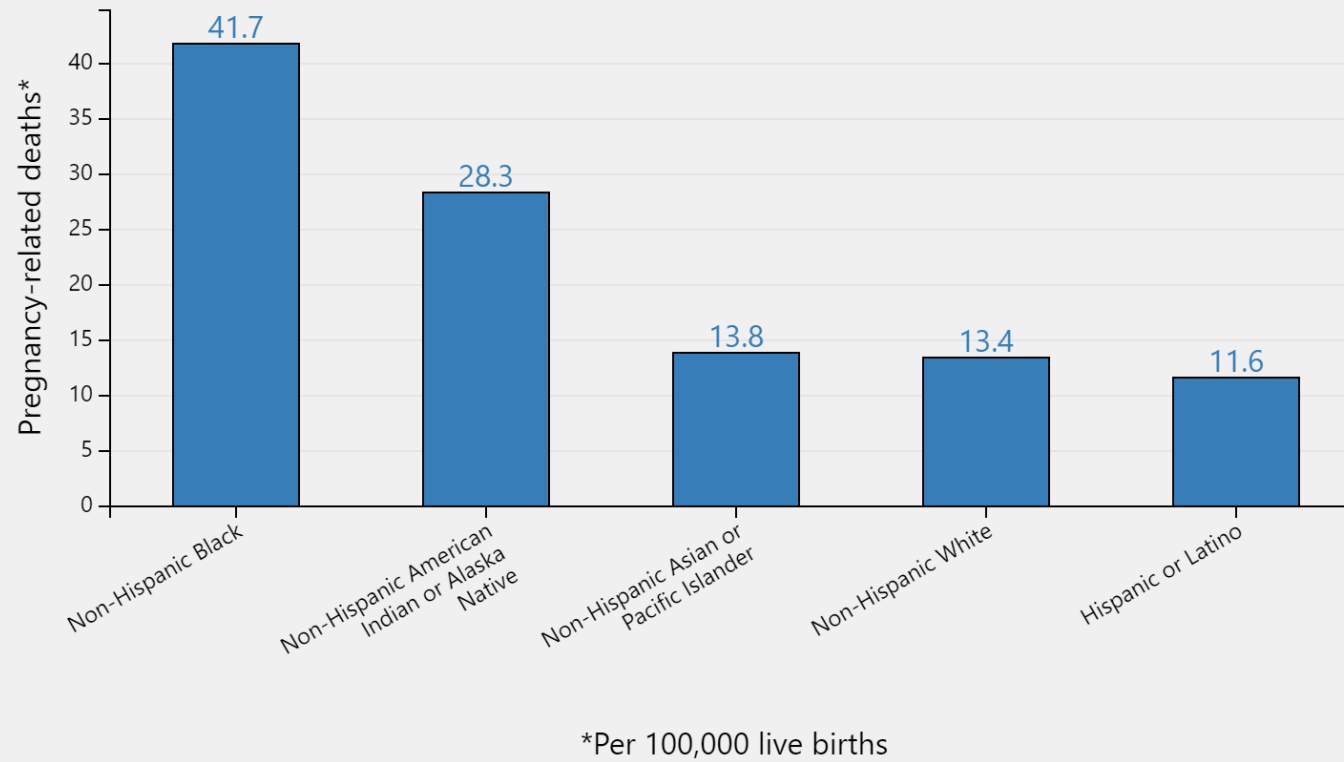
Table 1. Select Examples of Disparities in Obstetric and Gynecologic Health and Health Care ↩

Disparities in Health Outcomes	AI/AN	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White
Infertility in last 12 months (% of women) ^a	N/A	10	12	9	7
Unintended pregnancy (% of pregnancies) ^b	N/A	N/A	69	56	42
Preterm birth (% of live births) ^c	13	10	17	12	10
Fetal death (/1,000 live births + fetal deaths) ^d	N/A	N/A	11	5	5
Maternal death (/100,000 live births) ^{e,f}	N/A	8	26	5	7
Gonorrhea (/100,000 population) ^g	96	18	570	N/A	24
Cervical cancer (/100,000 population) ^h	7	7	10	11	7
Breast cancer deaths (/100,000 population) ⁱ	15	11	31	15	22
Diabetes-related deaths (/100,000 population) ^j	22	11	33	13	24
Disparities in Health Care Access and Services					
Birth control provided in past year (% of women aged 15–44 years) ^k	N/A	N/A	29	29	37
Pap testing within 3 years (% of women aged 21–65 years) ^l	79	75	85	79	83
Mammography within 2 years (% of women aged 50–74 years) ^l	69	64	73	70	73
Ever received infertility treatment (% of women) ^a	N/A	N/A	11	12	16
Prenatal care in first trimester (% of births) ^c	69	84	75	76	89
Cesarean delivery (% of births) ^c	29	34	36	32	32

Abbreviations: AI/AN, American Indian or Alaska Native; N/A, data not available.

Pregnancy-Related Deaths by Race/Ethnicity

Pregnancy-Related Mortality Ratio by Race/Ethnicity:
2014-2017



■ Pregnancy-related mortality ratio [Reset](#)

It's not race. It's racism.

Race is not a risk factor for health disparities

Racism is a major cause of health disparities

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

Philosopher George Santayana

The birth and legitimization of Modern
Gynecology is deeply and painfully
intertwined with the enslavement and
objectification of Black women



Illustration of Dr. J. Marion Sims with Anarcha by Robert Thom. Pearson Museum, Southern Illinois University School of Medicine

Prominent Medical Doctors Experimented on the Bodies of Enslaved Black Women

- Ephraim McDowell – the “Father of the Ovariectomy”
- John Peter Mettauer - the first American physician to perform a successful plastic surgery
- François Marie Prevost - the “Father of the Cesarean Section”

Time to Recognize the Contributions of Enslaved Black Women to Obstetrics and Gynecology

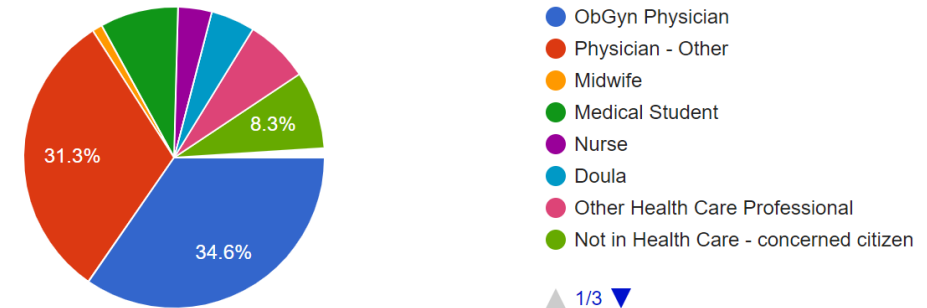
It is time to recognize the contributions of enslaved Black women to Obstetrics and Gynecology. We pledge to observe February 28th to March 1st of every year from now forward as Betsy, Anarcha and Lucy's Commemorative Days. Betsy, Anarcha and Lucy were three enslaved Black women whose voices have remained unheard in the same manner that their screams of unimaginable pain were ignored during experimental fistula repair surgeries performed by Dr. Marion Sims.

History has failed to acknowledge the sacrifices of Betsy, Anarcha and Lucy. Instead, it has celebrated and immortalized the "ingenuity" and "vision" of Dr. Sims who repeatedly experimented on enslaved Black women without anesthesia for the purpose of restoring their bodies to be able to reproduce again and continue to enrich the white slave owner. It is time to bring the names and sacrifices of these three Black women to the forefront of our everyday consciousness, so we may learn from our complex and troublesome history.

We request that the stories of Betsy, Anarcha and Lucy be told to every Obstetrician and Gynecologist physician-in-training charged with caring for women so we may learn the painful side of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ObGyn) and never again repeat past acts of cruelty.

Profession

1,294 responses





— JOINT STATEMENT —

Obstetrics and Gynecology: Collective Action Addressing Racism

Recognition: We are committed to officially designating February 28 and March 1, the dates that bridge Black History and Women's History months, as days for formal acknowledgement of Betsey, Lucy, and Anarcha, the enslaved women operated on by Dr. J. Marion Sims, and other enslaved Black women who were subjected to abuse in the name of advancing science.