



November 3, 2022

Remembering Reverend Calvin O. Butts III

This week, we want to remember Reverend Dr. Calvin O. Butts III, a preacher and community leader in Harlem, who died last week. Rev. Butts, MD, left an indelible mark on our city. Here at Mount Sinai, we remember the expansive community health partnerships he helped lead, including M.I.C.A.H., which explored the connection between spirituality and health, and HEAL, which spread the word about detecting early signs of health complications. He also regularly brought Mount Sinai clinicians into Abyssinian Baptist Church for health screenings and visited our medical students to share the importance of understanding the social determinants of health. Rev. Dr. Butts will be sorely missed, and we extend our heartfelt condolences to his family, the Abyssinian Baptist Church community, and all New Yorkers Rev. Dr. Butts touched. You can read more about his impact [here](#).

The Link Between Medical Records and Discrimination

Happy Thursday, Mount Sinai community –

This week, we're highlighting the not-so-obvious link between medical records and racial discrimination. As you know, medical records are intended to document objective observations. However, when biased language—such as using quotation marks to communicate sarcasm or question a patient's sincerity—is included, it may impact care by sending an incorrect signal to future clinicians about a patient. Electronic medical records are a double-edged sword: On one hand, a biased comment in a patient's record will follow them throughout their health care journey from office to office. On the other hand, electronic records make it easier for researchers to analyze how language is used in medical charts records and study this issue.

In recent years, researchers have begun examining how bias in medical records may impact care. One paper from [Health Affairs](#) found that Black patients were two and a half times as likely as white patients to have at least one negative descriptive term used in their chart. Researchers also [found that](#) colloquial language and statements were often quoted in Black and brown patients' records, while more objective language was used for white patients. And another study, published in [JAMA](#), found that Black patients suffering from diabetes, substance use disorders, and chronic pain were more likely to have stigmatizing language such as “nonadherence,” “noncompliance,” “failed” or “failure,” “refuses” or “refused,” and, on occasion, “combative” or “argumentative” in their medical notes.



We spoke to **Bruce Darrow**, MD, PhD, Professor of Medicine and Cardiology, and Population Health Science and Policy, Senior Vice President of Information Technology, Deputy Chief Information Officer, and Chief Medical Information Officer for the Mount Sinai Health System about how Mount Sinai is working to fix this issue.

He told us the first step was realizing that we could only tackle a systemic problem like this if we understand its impact. So Mount Sinai educated staff to ensure race and ethnicity data were collected in an inclusive, accurate manner. This data empowers Mount Sinai to study issues such as health disparities and the language used in patients' records in a scientific way. Mount Sinai has also taken action to encourage clinicians to use standard language, which is less likely to be influenced by unconscious bias, when writing notes on patients' charts. For example, our electronic medical record system allows clinical teams to add drop down menus in note templates, which helps everyone use similar, objective language when filling out a patient's record.

The Health System has also been a leader in the open records movement, ensuring that patients have access to their charts well before it was mandated by the government. Bruce told us that the idea is resonating that "patients are owners of their medical records," which helps clinicians think holistically about what they are writing down and ensures they are not unintentionally using biased language.

We also invite you to join us this upcoming week for an event listed below.

All the best,

Angela and Shawn

Join Us for an Upcoming Event

Visit [Mount Sinai Daily](#) to see a full list of events for Native American History month, including:

- Virtual discussion, "Finding (Y)our Roots: Indigenous Ties in Latinx and American Culture" on Wednesday, November 9 at noon
- The Association of Native American Medical Students (ANAMS) Outing to the Water Memories Exhibit at The Metropolitan Museum of Art on Friday, November 11 at 1 pm

Chats for Change: "Every Image Embodies a Way of Seeing" (John Berger, Ways of Seeing)—Join Chats for Change on **Tuesday, November 8, at noon** to examine how visual tools such as photographs, illustrations, and animations are powerful components of medical practice, education, and communication but can also be impacted by our personal biases. The group will discuss individual experiences with visual tools in medicine and tactics to counteract bias in the images that are used. Chats for Change is a production of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai's Racism and Bias Initiative. [Register on Zoom](#).

[Road Map for Action](#)

[Past Bulletins](#)

