Asian Americans least likely to be screened for diabetes

Less than half of Asian Americans received recommended type 2 diabetes screening between 2012 and 2014

Do Asian Americans receive adequate preventative healthcare when it comes to being screened for type 2 diabetes? No, says a survey of 45 US states and territories. It also found that based on the guidelines set out by the American Diabetes Association on such matters, Asian Americans are in fact the least likely racial or ethnic group in the US to receive screening tests. This is worrying, because this population group has a very high risk of developing the disease, says study leader Elizabeth Tung of the University of Chicago in the US. These findings are published by Springer in the Journal of General Internal Medicine.

Even though Asian Americans tend to have a lower mean body mass index (BMI) than other racial and ethnic groups, they are still more likely to develop type 2 diabetes. This is attributed to a combination of genetic, physiological and environmental factors. One in every five Asian Americans already has diabetes. According to Tung, this figure is nearly twice as high as that of non-Hispanic whites.

To assess whether Asian Americans are therefore adequately screened, Tung’s research team turned to diabetes-related health information gathered from residents of 42 states and three US territories in the 2012 to 2014 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. This annual nationally representative telephonic survey collects information about Americans’ high-risk and preventative health practices. The researchers analyzed data of 526,000 adults who were eligible to be screened for type 2 diabetes in that they were either 45 years and older or were younger but overweight. The research group calculated the weighted proportion of adults in each racial and ethnic group who received screening tests.

Compared to non-Hispanic whites, the 9,310 Asian Americans in the sample were younger, more highly educated, more likely to be overweight and less likely to be obese. Overall, only 47.1 percent of them received diabetes screening. This makes their the least likely racial and ethnic group to receive such tests, compared to the 59.2 percent of non-Hispanic whites, 50.3 percent of Pacific Islanders, 60.2 percent of non-Hispanic blacks or 55.6 percent of American Indians or Alaskan Natives. There was an even wider disparity found when obese Asian Americans 45 years and older were compared with other groups.

“While screening was suboptimal in all racial and ethnic groups, Asian Americans were by far the least likely group to be appropriately screened,” says Tung. “Given the deleterious health effects of delaying diagnosis and treatment of diabetes, it is crucial that public health and clinical professionals improve screening and diagnosis of diabetes in Asian Americans.”

Reference:
2. The Journal of General Internal Medicine is the official journal of the Society of General Internal Medicine.

The full-text article is available to journalists on request.

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