Chronic Pruritus in Skin of Color: More Than Skin Deep

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Chronic pruritus (itch ongoing for longer than 6 weeks) affects roughly one in five people over a lifetime, yet its burden is not evenly distributed across populations. A growing body of evidence indicates that patients with skin of color experience itch that is more prevalent, more severe, more persistent, and more frequently undertreated. Additionally, patients with skin of color are perpetually underrepresented in clinical trials.

At the University of Michigan (Michigan Medicine), our Ypsilanti Health Center, which is located in an ethnically diverse neighborhood in Southeast Michigan, houses both our Skin of Color Clinic and our Itch Clinic within the Department of Dermatology. In this unique practice setting, we administer care to patients with a wide variety of racial and cultural backgrounds. To better understand prescribing trends, we analyzed a database of over 5 million Michigan Medicine patients who were cared for in outpatient clinics from 2000 to 2026. Out of over 4755 patients with prurigo nodularis seen at Michigan Medicine from 2017 to 2026, dupilumab was prescribed to 8.5% of Black or African American patients (56/658), 7.3% of Asian patients (26/357) and 6.1% of White patients (229/3750; overall χ^2 p=0.062). Compared with White patients, Black/African American patients had higher odds of dupilumab use (OR 1.43, 95% CI 1.05–1.93; p=0.022), whereas odds did not differ significantly for Asian patients (OR 1.20, 95% CI 0.79–1.83; p=0.386). Further studies

are planned to determine whether Skin of Color Clinics help ensure that a broad array of patients across many cultural backgrounds are prescribed biologics for chronic itch.

This lecture will also provide a summary of novel research findings regarding central sensitization of itch. Phenome-wide association study analysis across 263,374 cases from a University of Michigan primary care electronic health record cohort shows that patients with pruritus are likely to have one or more chronic overlapping pain conditions (COPCs), with an odds ratio of 3.18 (95% CI 3.06 - 3.31). Additionally, Black, Hispanic and Asian patients are more likely to carry a pruritus diagnosis than White patients with the same number of COPCs. Ongoing studies will aim to investigate the underlying physiologic, socioeconomic, and epidemiologic basis for these findings.

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