

Keynote Presentation #1

“It Begins With the Narrative”: Healing From Past Harm Through Uplifting Our Communities

Tackling Old Problems with New Solutions in Primary Care

May 2023



SPEAKER:

Gail Christopher, DN
Executive Director,
National Collaborative
For Health Equity

Community Violence, Trauma, and Racial Healing

On May 17, 2023, the Weitzman Institute hosted its second annual virtual symposium, continuing its two-decades-long tradition of bringing together leading health researchers, professionals, and organizers from across the nation to discuss their efforts in transforming the healthcare system.

The 2023 Symposium: “Tackling Old Problems with New Solutions in Primary Care,” began with **Dr. Gail Christopher’s** keynote address on “Community Violence, Trauma, and Racial Healing.” As the Executive Director for the National Collaborative for Health Equity, Dr. Christopher has spent her thirty-year career fighting to end health inequities that marginalized communities across the country face. Much of Dr. Christopher’s work has centered around the role of “racial healing,” a process that seeks to recover from the ways in which race has led to disparities in healthcare research and practices in primary care.

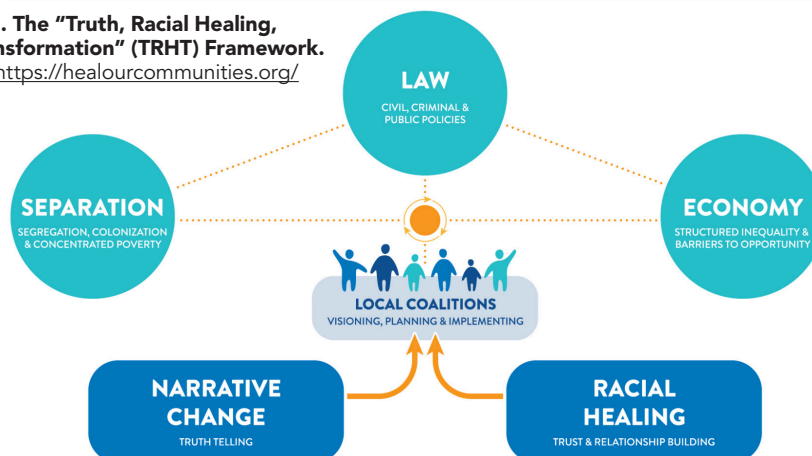
Understanding the “Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation” Framework

Beginning in 2016, Dr. Christopher, along with a team of 175 researchers and community organizers supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, developed a method for identifying and changing institutional practices that have long supported racial inequities. Called the “Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation” framework (TRHT), organizations that use the TRHT framework aim to identify and change the ways in which race has been used to uphold a “hierarchy of human value” in their community.

The TRHT framework begins by recognizing two core ways in which organizations can stand against systemic injustices: through narrative change and racial healing.

Figure 1. The “Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation” (TRHT) Framework.

Source: <https://healourcommunities.org/>



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“It is the underlying belief system that we have to transform,” Dr. Christopher said. “The research is clear that the transformation of our mindsets, our ideologies and our beliefs through direct engagement, connection and involvement with the perceived other is one of the best ways to accomplish that.”

Organizations then target the three ways in which racism has remained systematically embedded in our nation’s social structures: through separation, the law, and the economy.

“For so many centuries, the story of America has been a false story, a story that doesn’t assert the value and the worth of all human beings,” explained Dr. Christopher. “Make no mistake about it—we have an economic and legal system in this country that was built on this fallacy of a hierarchy of human value.”

According to Dr. Christopher, to tackle health inequities, we must first acknowledge that these years of de facto and de jure racial segregation has created deep racial divides in American communities, with rippling effects on our health care system. To that end, effective community-based health interventions must first recognize the wider struggles facing marginalized communities across the country.



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should set measurable goals and develop ways to continue transforming their culture in the long term.

According to Dr. Christopher, over the years, the TRHT framework has helped make real progress. “Since it was developed in 2016, the Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation framework has been used by dozens of communities across the country with the goal of uprooting the conscious and unconscious belief in a hierarchy of human value.”

Applying the TRHT Framework to Issues in Primary Care



As a life-long doctor herself, Dr. Christopher dedicated the final portion of her keynote to the importance of healthcare organizations introducing the TRHT framework into their workplace.

“[Healthcare providers] have to be able to recognize the stereotypes and the unjust patterns that surface,” Dr. Christopher said. “We have to be more than just conscious of our biases. We have to be conscious of how those biases show up in the data that we see. We have to see how structural racism shows up in the environment and in the conditions that are in our communities today.”

Healthcare professionals and providers can look to use the TRHT framework to re-examine the ways in which they conduct research, collect data, and provide health services. By calling in community members and having open conversations about how healthcare services have caused harm, providers can begin to make a real difference.

“Over the years, practitioners have learned that relationship building by stakeholders in the community is an essential ingredient to overcoming [racial] divides,” Dr. Christopher said. “By healing through storytelling and understanding our community members, we can collaboratively craft plans for creating transformational change to the laws, economic rules and physical structures that keep us apart and unequal.”

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Dr. Christopher further illustrated that racism should not just be understood in the abstract—populations experiencing racism can face severe long-term health effects from the stress caused by race-based harm.

“We have to understand that the whole body has to be addressed, and that means mind and body interventions,” said Dr. Christopher. “For so many years, we talked about racism causing health inequities and health disparities, but we didn’t unpack the biological, biochemical, and physiological pathways that racism affects.”

As Dr. Christopher explained, an ever-growing number of studies have found that prolonged exposure to racism has profound impacts on a patient’s risk of cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, and neurological diseases.

important. As Dr. Christopher explained, healthcare providers hold an important role in the community by being able to provide both preventive interventions as well as post-trauma care.

“[Primary care providers] have to do the community advocating, organizing, and transforming work that is structural in nature, and we have to make every effort to sustain it,” Dr. Christopher said. “But we can also understand the mechanisms of racism and develop interventions that help to mitigate the health effects of racism on an individual basis while we’re making structural changes in our society.”

For health care professionals interested in making changes to their organization, “do the racial healing work with different community stakeholders speaking directly with your administration” urged Dr. Christopher. “Go through the visioning process, and ask yourselves, ‘how will our world be different, or how will we work differently?’” By using the TRHT framework in their practice, healthcare clinicians and practitioners can learn where and when to provide these critical community-based solutions to their patients, right from the source.

Dr. Christopher’s newest book, ***Rx Racial Healing: A Guide to Embracing Our Humanity***, can be purchased on the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ website. All proceeds raised will be used by the Association of American Colleges and Universities to operate TRHTs on academic campuses across the nation.

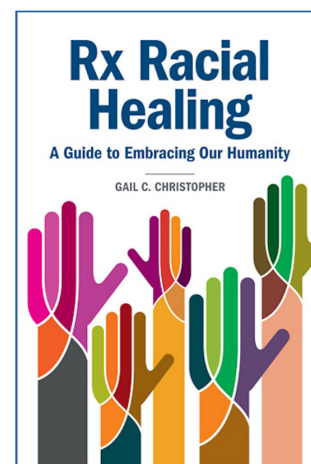


Figure 2. Rx Racial Healing: A Guide to Embracing Our Humanity.

Source: <https://www.aacu.org/publication/rx-racial-healing-a-guide-to-embracing-our-humanity>

Find Additional 2023 Weitzman Institute Symposium Briefs at
<https://www.weitzmaninstitute.org/2023-symposium-session-briefs/>

For More Information

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