



For Immediate Release

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UNCP professor continues research to improve minority participation in medical trials

PEMBROKE, NC – Dr. Namyeon Lee, an assistant professor in the Department of Mass Communication, has published a study that compares differing message strategies for recruiting Black Americans into clinical trials, where they are typically underrepresented.

Co-authored with colleagues Dr. Lee first met at the University of Missouri, where she earned her doctorate in strategic communication, the article is entitled "Overcoming Black Americans' Psychological and Cognitive Barriers to Clinical Trial Participation: Effects of News Framing and Exemplars" and is published in *Health Communication*, Volume 37.

They experimented online with 390 participants exposed to news simulations that varied in how they framed potential barriers to joining a clinical trial. The short news stories were attributed to the Associated Press and appeared in mock Facebook posts.

Some of the stories addressed psychological barriers to participation (such as fear or mistrust) and some addressed cognitive barriers (such as lack of understanding of how clinical trials work). Some included testimony and a photo of a man who had participated in a clinical trial. All the research respondents were Black, but some received news stories with only a [fictional] Black male example and some with only a [fictional] white male.

"There are many barriers to people participating in clinical trials because, for participants, it is an added layer of uncertainty that takes courage," Lee said. "We also see whether adding a person's photo—an exemplar—within a social media post that differed in race could influence viewers' participation intention."

They found that the racially matched testimony was most effective at improving attitudes toward participating in a clinical trial, especially when the news story was addressing people's psychological barriers to participating.

"Black participants responded with the highest intention to participate in future clinical trials when a Black spokesperson shared concerns related to mistrust and fear and provided information that possibly overcomes those barriers," Lee explained.

"In journalism, the use of human narratives and testimonials have already been used a lot," she said. "Our research shows that health communicators should not only look for previous participants but also pitch stories about how people overcame obstacles. This could help more people sign up for clinical trials."

Co-authors of the study were Dr. Ciera Kirkpatrick at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Dr. Sisi Hu at the University of Arkansas; Yoorim Hong, Dr. Sungkyoung Lee, and Dr. Amanda Hinnant at the University of Missouri. Each contributed equally to the work. They aim to help the medical field improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities in minority communities. Treatments and side effects can vary by race, ethnicity, sex, and many other variables, making diverse clinical trials necessary.

About UNC Pembroke

Established in 1887 as a normal school to train American Indian teachers, UNC Pembroke today has an enrollment of 8,319 in 41 undergraduate and 18 graduate programs. UNCP is a constituent institution of The University of North Carolina System. For more information, contact Mark Locklear, Public Communications Specialist with University Communications and Marketing, via email (mark.locklear@uncp.edu) or by phone (910.521.6351). Connect with UNC Pembroke on social media or online at uncp.edu to learn how the university is changing lives through education.

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