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Practice Commentary

Although it is true that ethnicity should play a role in the management of most medical problems, it rarely is clear just how important that role should be. Researchers recently have begun to consider pharmacogenetic, pharmacokinetic, and pharmacodynamic differences based on race. The ethnic-related factors that could be considered in the pharmacotherapy of anxiety and mood disorders in African Americans, as pointed out in this article, must also include sociocultural influences. And while it is important to know that as many as 33% of African Americans may have a genetic predisposition that results in slower metabolism of some drugs, it is just as important to observe that African Americans are at greater risk for being given more severe psychiatric diagnoses despite lack of greater prevalence of these disorders when standardized diagnostic systems are used. The clear message for me is that physicians should look at the issue of psychotropic drug use with a broad, open mind and be objective, paying special attention to patients and their response and to the side effects of any medication, regardless of the patient's ethnic background.

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