

Episode: Author Interview: “*Community Mental Health Centers’ Roles in Depolicing Medicine*”

Guest: Carmen Black, MD

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript by: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I’m your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative format for accessing the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Carmen Black, an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at the Yale University School of Medicine with a primary clinical appointment at the Connecticut Mental Health Center. She’s here to discuss her article coauthored with Drs Emma Lo and Keith Gallagher, [Community Mental Health Centers’ Roles in Depolicing Medicine](#), in the March 2022 issue of *The Journal*, [Toward Abolition Medicine](#). Dr Black, thank you so much for being on the show. [music fades out]

DR CARMEN BLACK: Thank you for creating the time and space to share our advocacy.

HOFF: So, to begin with, what is the main ethics point that you and your coauthors are making in this article?

BLACK: What we’re making in this article is experientially, as community psychiatrists, public psychiatrists, we’re noticing that a lot of resources are being prioritized to these centers that predominantly and disproportionately serve people of color and with severe mental illness. And we wanted to get the historical undertones in how white supremacy and racism plays into this institution of policing community mental health care.

HOFF: And what do you see as the most important thing for health professions students and trainees at the beginnings of their career to take from this article?

BLACK: So, these images of metal detectors and armed guards and understaffed, underfunded facilities, they prime trainees for the rest of their career to associate Black and brown folks and people with SMI to think of them as violent or dangerous. The message is literally primed at some of our front doors, and we want to create a counternarrative, an evidence-based narrative that this is biased. This isn’t right. We have tons of papers showing how people with severe mental illness are more likely to be victims of crime instead of the perpetrators. So, why do we not critically examine where our funding goes for policing versus clinical care?

HOFF: And if you could add a point to your article that you didn’t get to fully explore, what would that be?

BLACK: What my coauthors and I found was that a lot of the “foundational evidence” supporting these practices is either non-existent or poorly crafted. There’s a lot of confoundings that, you know, a bucket full of confiscated knives equates to reduced hospital violence. And in medicine, they teach us numbers needed to treat. They teach us that correlation is not causation. And so, if we use some of these more rigorous medical

methods, epidemiology, bio stats approaches to policing health care, none of our practices, especially for the astronomical cost involved, add up. [theme music returns]

HOFF: Dr Black, thank you so much for your time and for your contribution to the Journal.

BLACK: Thank you.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of the March 2022 issue for free, visit our site, [JournalOfEthics.org](https://www.journalofethics.org). We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.