

Tuskegee and the Health of Black Men

Marcella Alsan and Marianne Wanamaker*

First version: December 2015

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST IN OUR PAPER.
THE PAPER IS UNDERGOING DISCLOSURE REVIEW AND WILL BE AVAILABLE ON
OUR WEBSITES SHORTLY.

Abstract

JEL Codes: I25, O15 For forty years, the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male passively monitored hundreds of adult black males with syphilis despite the availability of effective treatment. The study's methods have become synonymous with exploitation and mistreatment by the medical community. We find that the historical disclosure of the study in 1972 is correlated with increases in medical mistrust and mortality and decreases in outpatient physician interactions for black men. Blacks possessing prior experience with the medical community, including veterans and women, appear to have been less affected by the disclosure. Our findings relate to a broader literature on how beliefs are formed and the importance of trust for economic exchanges involving asymmetric information.

*We are grateful to William Collins, Joe Ferrie, Nathan Nunn, Achyuta Adhvaryu, Arun Chandrasekhar, Martha Bailey, Rebecca Diamond, Melanie Morten and participants at NBER DAE-Abstracts, University of Tennessee-Knoxville, Vanderbilt Health Policy, Carnegie Mellon Applied Microeconomics, University of Copenhagen Economics, and University of Pennsylvania Health Policy for constructive comments. We thank the CDC for providing access and to the administrators at the Atlanta and Stanford Census Research Data Centers for their help in navigating the restricted data. We thank Michael Haines and Andrew Goodman-Bacon for sharing data.