



# Representation Matters: How Medical Textbook Illustrations Shape POC Diagnoses

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## Introduction

How much harm can a lack of drawings have on actual healthcare providers and patients? More than you give them credit. According to the National Library of Medicine (2021), “dark-skin representation in dermatology textbooks ranged from 4% to 18%.” The lack of diversity in medical textbooks not only continues the microaggressive racism in healthcare, but also directly leads to misdiagnosis of diseases for POC patients.

## Background

Medical textbooks are portals to learning for healthcare professionals, nurses, physicians; they not only introduce diseases and their symptoms, but guide providers through the process of diagnoses. And if they are not exposed to “different backgrounds, body shapes, and ethnicities,” they are not going to be able to “appropriately engage with those patients in the clinic.” (Roller, 2024). Thus, this lack of representation not only affects the present POC patients, but also the future of healthcare providers’ efficiency in patient care.

## Real-World Impacts

In light of this pressing issue, advocates with the ability and passion to increase equity in the healthcare field are climbing staircases by starting their own medical illustration companies. While Ni-Ka Ford explained

that self-diagnosis can become more difficult when patients “can’t find resources that resemble [them],” Sana Khan brought the idea of how “certain groups are prone to get affected by some diseases like vitiligo, sickle cell anemia” and the wrong representation can “reinforce stereotypes.” (Roller 2024). Through the insights of Ford and Khan, two things are for sure: bad representation is worse than lack of representation. While eliminating the “no discrimination in patient care” part, this lack of good portrayal has no hesitancy to continue microaggressive racism towards patients by faltering the care that they have the absolute right to receive.

## Conclusion

In light of injustices, justice follows through; the same way, the future of equitable medical illustrations in textbooks is growing towards the right direction with medical students speaking up and passionate illustrators taking stand in the business. Patients, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or gender, have the right to receive healthcare that is catered towards only one goal: to provide and care with respect and empathy.

## References

“*Illustrating Change: Diversity in Medical Textbooks.*” Think Global Health, <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/illustrating-change-diversity-medical-textbooks>. Accessed 10 Sep. 2025.

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