

# The Current Landscape of Vitiligo Treatment Centers

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## To the Editor:

Specialized vitiligo treatment centers are instrumental in providing comprehensive care and advancing research for individuals with vitiligo. There is a paucity of literature characterizing the demographics, practice setting, and research impact of vitiligo treatment centers. This study sought to characterize the current landscape of these specialized centers.

The Global Vitiligo Foundation (GVF) website was used to identify United States (US) and international vitiligo treatment centers and affiliated faculty.<sup>1</sup> US centers were further analyzed using their institutional website. The racial/ethnic composition of each center's region was obtained using zip code data from the US Census. Additionally, whether centers led clinical trials was determined using the clinicaltrials.gov website. For each physician, affiliated institutions, departmental titles, demographics, and years since completing residency were collected. Finally, research productivity was assessed by the

number of publications and H-index obtained through Scopus. A total of 35 vitiligo treatment centers were identified in the US (n=12), Egypt (n=10), Brazil (n=6), India (n=4), Mexico (n=1), and Australia (n=2). All 12 US centers were in metropolitan areas according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes. Half of the centers were in areas with more racial/ethnic minorities than the national population. Most centers (75%) were in academic settings, and the majority (83.3%) conducted clinical trials.

Among the US centers, 15 affiliated physicians were identified, all associated with academic institutions. Nearly two-thirds of the faculty were male (Table 2). Notably, all but one were individuals of color. Although the prevalence of vitiligo is similar across racial/ethnic groups, the impacts of vitiligo differ based on skin color and cultural factors.<sup>2,3</sup> Individuals with darker

**TABLE 1.**

United States Vitiligo Treatment Center Characteristics	
Treatment Center Characteristics (n=12)	Number (%)
Location	
Pacific	6 (50%)
West South Central	2 (16.7%)
East North Central	2 (16.7%)
South Atlantic	1 (8.3%)
New England	1 (8.3%)
Rural-Urban Classification	
Metropolitan <sup>1</sup>	12 (100%)
Practice type	
Academic	9 (75%)
Private	3 (25%)
Clinical trials	
Yes	10 (83.3%)
Zip code with racial/ethnic minority population greater than national population	
Yes	6 (50%)

<sup>1</sup>Designated by US Department of Agriculture Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/rural-urban-commuting-area-codes/>

**TABLE 2.**

Faculty Characteristics	
Faculty Characteristics (n=15)	Number (%)
Gender	
Female	5 (30%)
Male	9 (60%)
Skin of color (SOC)	
Yes	14 (93.3%)
Degrees	
MD	11 (73.3%)
MD/PhD	3 (20%)
MD, MSc	1 (6.7%)
Departmental Title	
Department Chair	1 (6.7%)
Division Head	1 (6.7%)
Associate Professor	7 (46.7%)
Assistant Professor	2 (13.3%)
Adjunct Professor	1 (6.7%)
Other	3 (20%)
Average years since residency	19
Average total publications	116.8
Mean H-index	26.3

skin may experience increased disease visibility, contributing to greater psychosocial burden.<sup>3</sup> More research is needed to understand factors that influence dermatologists' decisions to specialize in treating vitiligo.

Faculty affiliated with these centers were often in advanced stages of their careers, with higher academic ranks and leadership positions. They were on average 19 years out from completing residency. Additionally, faculty had significant research experience and impact, averaging 116.8 publications and an H-index of 26.3.

Study limitations include the process for identifying demographics and potentially outdated information on institutional websites. It is also possible that not all treatment centers were listed on the GVF website, as listing requires physicians to attend at least one recent GVF or Vitiligo International Symposium meeting. Additionally, analyses were not performed on international centers due to variation in online availability of information. Nevertheless, we believe this study increases understanding of the landscape of specialized vitiligo centers, particularly those in the US.

Vitiligo treatment centers contribute to innovation in research and provide subspecialized expert clinical care. Most faculty affiliated with vitiligo treatment centers were physicians of color practicing in metropolitan areas in the US. As most faculty were in advanced phases of their academic trajectory and had notable research productivity, findings from this study highlight opportunities for mentorship of young trainees interested in specializing in pigmentary disorders.

## DISCLOSURES

Dr Elbuluk has served as a consultant, advisory board member, and/or speaker for Avita, Scientis, Incyte, VisualDx, La Roche Posay, Beiersdorf, Unilever, Eli Lilly, Galderma, Pfizer, L'Oreal, McGraw-Hill, Dior, Medscape, AbbVie, Takeda, and Sanofi. She has received royalties from McGraw-Hill. She has stock options in VisualDx. The remaining authors have no disclosures to report.

**IRB approval status:** No human subjects were involved in this study. Thus, institutional review board (IRB) approval was not required.

## REFERENCES

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