PROVIDENCE – Dr. Jeffrey Borkan opened a symposium on race, ethnicity and the Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH) June 16th at the Alpert Medical School by saying racial and ethnic barriers in the PCMH and health care need to be examined and strategies developed to address them.

“Questions on this topic haven’t been asked, the discussion hasn’t happened. African Americans, Latinos, and the poor are sicker and die at a younger age. We need to focus on the health and well being of the populations we serve and prioritize that for our most underserved,” he said.

Dr. Borkan is chair of the Department of Family Medicine and assistant dean, Primary Care-Population Medicine Program Planning, at Brown.

Keynote speaker M. Norman Oliver, MD, chair of the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Virginia, addressed implicit biases in health care, among many other topics. He said a 2002 report by the Institute of Medicine (IOM), “Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care,” showed that minorities were less likely to be given appropriate cardiac medications or to undergo bypass surgery, and were less likely to receive kidney dialysis or transplants.

“We are members of the communities we serve. We are leaders and we should be joining with policy makers and other members of the community to address the social determinants of health,” Dr. Oliver said.

Dr. Pablo Rodriguez, an ob-gyn physician, who moderated a roundtable discussion at the event, related an incident in his office which highlighted implicit biases. The patient he was seeing had a thick African accent and, to his ultimate chagrin, he began speaking very slowly and in basic terms to her. She listened politely and then informed him she was a physician trained in England.

“Well, we all have human experiences like this. It’s part of the learning experience,” Dr. Rodriguez said.

The IOM study recommended collecting data on patients’ race, ethnicity and preferred language (REL) as one avenue to eliminate disparities by using EMR records to develop strategies to offer appropriate preventive care. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) expands and standardizes data collection about race, ethnicity and language. Several health care providers at the event questioned how this data can be used most effectively.

On the academic level, Jabbar Bennett, PhD, associate dean of recruiting and professional development at Brown, spoke of the Race and Medicine Task Force at the medical school, established to re-envision how medical students are taught about race, as one example of examining these issues. He also spoke of efforts at Brown to recruit medical students, faculty and fellows who are members of underrepresented groups.

The symposium was hosted by the medical school, the Brown Primary Care Transformation Initiative and supported by the Care Transformation Collaborative of Rhode Island and PCMH-Kids.

The planning committee included Joanna Brown, MD, MPH; Victoria Adewale, MSc; Robert Alleyne, Anne Pushee, RN; Jeffrey Borkan, MD, PhD; Roberta Goldman, PhD; Maria Sullivan and Kelli Landry.

A symposium on Race, Ethnicity and PCMH: Ensuring Everyone Has a Voice, was held June 16 at the Alpert Medical School. Dr. Pablo Rodriguez at podium moderated a policy roundtable discussion.