​

Simon Dyson: “What's the relationship between sickle cell disease and race... Well, in a sentence, sickle cell demonstrates the myth of distinct biological races, and the reality of racism It demonstrates the myth of race because Sickle Cell Gene is actually connected with environment and evolution. High rates of a Sickle Cell Gene in a population are because the Sickle Cell gene mutation protects strongly against a type of malaria called plasmodium falciparum. So the Sickle Cell Gene is found in other populations where conditions either are or historically were favorable to mosquitoes and malaria. This includes parts of India and Nepal, Eastern provinces in Saudi Arabia, marshlands in southern Iran, Oasis areas in Egypt, and parts of Greece, Sicily and Mainland Italy where malaria was present till just after the Second World War. So Sickle Cell really acquired its association with being Black because we first, or Western medicine first, came to know about Sickle Cell in the United States in the first half of the 20th century, because of most of those affected were inner city African American folks living in poverty, it was assumed that only Black people have sickle cell, but also that Sickle Cell mostly involved an early death in childhood. On the other hand, sickle cell does illustrate the reality of racism facing black people. As sickle-cell pioneers in the 1970s found, the manner in which sickle-cell comes to be an emblem of black activism meant that Sickle Cell drew the attention of racists in the National Front, and having a go at sickle cell is still one of the mainstays of white fascists on social media even today. In the 20th century, I'd say that racism showed itself as well in the lack of willingness on the part of statutory services such as education, social services and housing, to take account of the needs of those living with sickle cell disease. In terms of sickle-cell screening, sickle-cell had to meet prevalence thresholds not demanded of other rarer conditions, before newborn screening to save the lives of black infants was eventually made universal in England in 2004. So for anyone interested in anti-racist education sickle cell as a key resource as it shows on the one hand why there are no distinct biological races, but equally how and why racism remains a reality facing black people even to