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various types of cancers, and its overall mortality rates are similar to those of whites. Because of the high rates of skin and basal-cell skin cancer in blacks and white Hispanics, the assumption is that they share similar genetic risk factors. But the results of the new study seem to contradict this widely held view. Not only were the skin cancer rates among blacks and Hispanics generally lower than the rates among whites, but they also showed much less variation within racial and ethnic groups than the rates in whites. As a result, skin cancer rates in Hispanics and blacks as a group were much less strongly linked to environmental factors like air pollution than those of whites. To examine potential causes for such racial and ethnic differences in cancer rates, Dr. Chao-Hung Hsieh and colleagues at the Harvard School of Public Health evaluated the genetic differences between whites, blacks and Hispanics. The researchers examined individuals with five common genetic variants that affect the body's ability to prevent cancer, as well as other diseases. The researchers looked at the differences in these variants between individuals who belonged to the three different ethnic groups and compared the prevalence of common cancers in each group. Overall, the numbers of individuals with each of the genetic variants were higher among whites and lower among blacks and Hispanics. For most of the cancers examined, Hispanics had higher rates of cancer than blacks and whites. However, when the researchers adjusted for these genetic differences, they found that the racial and ethnic differences in cancer rates remained. This suggests that racial and ethnic differences in cancer rates are not due to genetic differences. Instead, the researchers found that there were large differences in environmental factors between racial and ethnic groups. For example, air pollution was higher in major cities among whites than among blacks