

Dear UCSD School of Medicine community,

Our commencement speaker on Sunday, Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, in an inspiring and timely address, called on us to dismantle the “*malignancy of racism*.” Her final message to our new physicians was “...*you are all entrusted to be the voice of health. I urge you to use the tools you learned here to keep your eyes open, to remain curious, to dig deep, to take action, to stand up for what is right and to always use your voice for good.*” We are proud of our students, immediately taking up that mantle, who used their voices and images to stand with victims of police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement during the ceremony.

As a community, we are feeling the outrage and frustration of the recent murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and are reminded of the countless others who have been victims of violence at the hands of the police for far too long. We see the immediate and well-funded militarized responses to peaceful demonstrators in stark contrast to the economic struggles and health disparities of black and brown people during the COVID-19 outbreak. We acknowledge the epidemics of structural and personal racism that have created these inequities and brought us to this moment in history.

We celebrate the diversity that exists in our community and understand that these events affect everyone in different ways; that racial violence, while being perpetrated in the highest levels of organized structures, is very personal. We commit to championing our faculty, staff and students of color through their personal journeys, listening to them and learning from them while implementing policies to create an environment free of racism in which to research, learn and teach.

An important part of our mission is to create a curriculum which addresses the part we play in righting these systemic injustices and we use these tragic events to strengthen our resolve.

We write to share our intentions to continue to refine our curriculum through the Health Equity Thread and the establishment of an Antiracism (opposing racism and promoting racial tolerance) Lab. We welcome your suggestions, including learning materials, resources, and identification of new partnerships. We thank the Student National Medical Association for their leadership, advocacy, and for sharing useful resources on antiracism. We support SNMA’s aim to teach our future and current health care providers how to care for patients within institutions and systems that are racist, and to understand how systemic inequities affect the health of the people we serve. We plan to collaborate with the new UC San Diego Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Longevity Science under the leadership of Founding Dean Cheryl Anderson, who proposes a curriculum and research infused with scholarship on power, privilege, race and health. She aspires for each of us to pull every lever of the socioecological framework to eliminate once and for all the cries of “I can’t breathe” that currently and so painfully echo across this nation. We will collaborate with the Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences in education, research, and clinical areas, where appropriate, to address health equity and oppose racism.

Our PRIME-HEq (Program in Medical Education-Health Equity) provides a long history of and infrastructure on health equity leadership in our communities. We enjoy a collaborative partnership with the Vice Chancellor’s Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, and will consult the Department of Ethnic Studies for expert guidance on critical race theory and other relevant frameworks. We collaborate with Diversity Deans from other medical schools and the AAMC (Association of American Medical Colleges) in our collective pursuit for a uniform curriculum on antiracism.

Our educational plans include the following considerations:

- examine our current curriculum critically and rethink the way we present race and racial disparities;
- implement new health equity content in preclinical and clinical courses and exams;
- create an antiracism journal club (for students, residents, and faculty);
- develop a History of Racism in Medicine course;
- develop a course on the role of structural racism in public health, including access to nutrition and healthy lifestyle behaviors, safe potable water, housing security, exposure to pollution, and other contemporary public health issues;
- supplement the First Lecture for incoming MS1s with a summer book club to discuss “How to be an AntiRacist,” “Medical Apartheid,” “The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks” and other recommended books and educational videos;
- develop an AntiRacism Lab to dissect, explain and identify solutions to oppose racism and promote racial tolerance, equality and justice;
- invest time in faculty training on implicit bias, microaggressions, racism, and health inequities
- recruit faculty with a vested interest in practicing, teaching, and researching health equity;
- iterate and improve our educational plans by incorporating other suggestions pending feedback from the School of Public Health, EDI Office, Ethnic Studies, AAMC, other medical schools and you.

Our community partnerships will continue to prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion, centered on COVID-19 interventions to eliminate health inequities that exacerbate the risk in vulnerable communities. Our Hispanic Centers of Excellence program received supplementary funding to establish telehealth capacity at our UCSD Student Run Free Clinic sites. Our new partnerships include DCP’s participation in the Multicultural COVID-19 Task Force (where we facilitated establishment of free SARS-CoV-2 testing in Southeast San Diego), the Pacific Islander COVID-19 Task Force (where we provided epidemiologic data, used as testimony in Congress for the House Ways and Means Committee on COVID-19 disparities), and the Alliance Health Clinic in El Cajon, which serves a sizeable refugee community. We were recently invited to partner with the Preuss School to help them develop a curriculum on health equity for middle and high school students.

We used our voice by speaking about COVID-19 disparities on KPBS-TV, during a UCSD webinar sponsored by the EDI office, and while working with local and state politicians to provide accessible COVID-19 testing in Southeast San Diego. We used our voice while voting for and providing guidance on COVID-19 funding initiatives through the National Institutes of Health’s Council of Councils.

While our methodologies are still developing, our fiscal resources are still tentative, and our direction still requiring navigation, our commitment to dismantle the pathology of racism with you and each other is resolute. We will keep working until health, justice and equality are real for everyone.

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