

June 8, 2020

Dear Residents and Fellows,

This message is the most difficult one I have had to write to you. I have spent the last few days reflecting on what to say and have come to the realization that there are no right words without a sincere and unwavering commitment to action. We have used the word unprecedented countless times to describe the pandemic, but what we are seeing in the United States over the last two weeks is far from unprecedented and far from being limited to the U.S.

I have seen the images of George Floyd's murder at the hands of the police. I have read the stories of Breonna Taylor, Arnaud Arbery, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, recognizing that there are countless other lives, disrupted, damaged and lost that remain unreported. Like many of you, I have reacted with sadness, anger, and helplessness at the lives lost to anti-black racism. At the same time, I realize I have felt these emotions before at similar images and stories. But, as the media images fade until the next publicized tragedy, we must remember that systemic racism is a daily reality for many in our institutions, communities and health care systems.

Importantly, the [Statement on the killing of George Floyd and racial justice](#) written by our colleagues at the African-Caribbean Faculty Association of McMaster University (ACFAM), highlighted:

“While we recognize the current protest and calls for justice, we also recognize that these struggles of resistance have a long history. It is not the struggles that appear intermittent to some, it is our attention to systemic, structural, and historical racism, anti-Black racism, and colonialism that is intermittent. This is what must change. If these moments evoke a renewed clarity for people, to appreciate and respond to the complexities of racism, we must do so by acknowledging our complicities and silences.”

It is so important that we, as a medical school, as educators, as healthcare workers and trainees, take time to identify our “complicities and silences,” and how this contributes to systemic oppression. In the words of McMaster developmental pediatrician Dr. Kassia Johnson, “we have to get comfortable with being uncomfortable” and “silence perpetuates racism” <https://twitter.com/i/status/1268887454788079617> .

Racial injustice is health injustice. Unsurprisingly, the communities hit hardest by COVID-19 are the same communities facing widespread health and social disparities every day. These are the same communities demanding social change. While it is important to acknowledge and condemn racism at every level of our society, meaningful change will only come when we go beyond words. As stated in Dr. O’Byrne’s letter last week, those of us in leadership positions

have the responsibility to do more to serve our communities and address all racial injustices and must do so.

What are we doing in Postgraduate Medical Education to help to dismantle systemic racism? The simple answer is not enough. As the associate dean of postgraduate medicine, I am committed to learning from the resources that already exist and using them to initiate conversations about building stronger systems of accountability for addressing systemic racism at the institutional level. I will take the time to learn from work that is already being done and strive to build solutions that are from and for the communities in need. As always, I welcome and, indeed, need your help, your support and your voices. I will still feel angry, still feel sad but hopefully by committing to engage with others in meaningful and sustained action, I can feel a little less helpless.

Parveen Wasi

Parveen Wasi, MD, FRCPC
Associate Dean, Postgraduate Medical Education
McMaster University

Parveen Wasi