

A Call to Action to Address Systemic Racism in Health, Health Care, and the Nursing Profession

Dear Nursing Section Fellows and Members,

We echo the sentiments expressed by NYAM's President, Dr. Judith Salerno, in her most recent email to the membership. The Nursing Section of the New York Academy of Medicine also condemns the most recent deaths of African-Americans and most recently, George Floyd.

As nurses and midwives, we are confronted by racism and discrimination in our clinical practice sites, our classrooms, our research settings, the policy realm, and our lives. At times, we bear witness to our colleagues and students who experience systemic institutionalized racism and discrimination. COVID-19 has also laid bare the structural discrimination built into our health systems as we see how the virus has disproportionately affected communities of color in New York City and around the country. All of these recent events are interconnected.

The events of the last week are a signal that we can no longer be silent and do things the way we always have done them.

The Codes of Ethics for Nursing and Midwifery require that we are advocates for all people regardless of their race, religion, gender or sexual orientation and to speak up for justice and equality. We cannot do so if we do not collectively work toward addressing racism, discrimination, and bias within our profession and health care more broadly.

We urge all members to take steps to address racism, discrimination, and bias where they work to address health and healthcare disparities.

We urge schools of nursing and midwifery to address disparities in the minority student and faculty experience that drive many highly qualified individuals out of the profession and contribute to the lack of role models.

The New York Academy of Medicine's mission is to advance health equity. As the nursing section--who also represents midwifery--within the NYAM, we need to be the voice for the voiceless, a beacon of strength for those who are weak, and healers for communities, our patients and one another.

Now more than ever, nurses and midwives are needed to propel this nation forward to gain awareness of inequality. It is our moral imperative to lead change for greater equity for all people as a basic human right. We must eliminate disparities rooted in racism and discrimination if we are to improve the health of our patients, communities and the nation. It is time to unite and work together to improve health for all.

Moving forward, our section's programming will create opportunities to have these very necessary conversations and develop plans of action. We hope you will participate and bring others into the conversation so we can confront these issues collectively and strategically.

Allison Squires, Toby Bressler and Maria Vezina