

# #WHITECOATSFORBLACKLIVES

The Department of Surgery had supportive presence at the #WHITECOATSFORBLACKLIVES (WC4BL) event at the #BLACKLIVESMATTER protest march in Seattle, Washington on Saturday, June 6th, 2020. Many of our faculty, trainees and staff share their protest photos and personal thoughts on the WC4BL movement including Dr. Estell Williams, Assistant Professor, Division of General Surgery, who discusses her involvement in organizing the Healthcare March for Justice, following this message from Dr. Douglas E. Wood, The Henry N. Harkins Professor and Chair.



Dr. Douglas E. Wood

Dear Readers,

I don't know what to say. I am jarred, horrified, and saddened by recent events of violence and racism directed towards black, indigenous, and people of color. Of course, these recent tragedies are not in isolation, they are not new, but they are a grim reminder of the pervasive impact of racism in our community, and of the disparity of experiences each of us have at work, with figures of authority, and within our society.

And I really don't know what to say, but I feel it is important to speak up, to say something. Most of us are physicians and all of us work in healthcare. Our mission at UW Medicine is "To improve the health of the public." This is not just the work of individual patient care. This includes caring about social justice, and standing up and not being silent in the face of injustice and racism.

I would point us all to a meaningful editorial in JAMA from Don Berwick, entitled "[Moral Choices for Today's Physician](#)." A couple of quotes from his article stand out to me..."What am I part of?' should supersede prerogative. It counsels a continual inquiry: Who depends on me? And how am I doing in their eyes?...defense of local stakes at the expense of fragile communities and disadvantaged populations goes far, far beyond health care itself. So does the physician's ethical duty...The work of a physician as healer cannot stop at the

door of an office, the threshold of an operating room, or the front gate of a hospital. The rescue of a society and the restoration of a political ethos that remembers to heal have become the physician's jobs, too. Professional silence in the face of social injustice is wrong."

I am reaching out to you—not because I have the words or the solution, but as a message that I see you. We are hurting with the continued violence against black, indigenous and people of color, and with the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Raylor and George Floyd. The images and the reality is jarring, and I know I cannot put myself in the shoes or in the hearts of my black colleagues and friends, and the black members of our community I do not know, but who suffer daily from the impact of racism. Their lives are in turmoil as they wrestle with the most recent evidence of deep injustice. I was inspired by the courage of Chris Cooper, bird watching in Central Park, while I was outraged and stunned by video evidence of white privilege attempting to leverage institutional racism to intimidate, or possibly even kill Chris Cooper.

I don't know what I should say except that as I watch, I know that many of our faculty, residents, staff, and students carry this additional burden daily—the fear for their own families and for themselves. Words are not enough, but I'm writing to say that we stand with you in the horror of these deaths. The diversity and inclusion we strive for in the Department of Surgery is not just the goal of a more diverse workforce, it is a solidarity as a community of UW Surgery. I stand with my black colleagues. I acknowledge the trauma and pain of their experience, and also acknowledge that I cannot know the depth of challenges they bear. I urge us all to support our colleagues and friends, to reach out, to not be silent, to openly demonstrate that we care and that we are not complacent. And I hope that those of us who are white will learn to not be dependent on our minority colleagues to teach us about racism. We need to learn, to study, to be accountable ourselves to understanding racism and being proactive to mitigate its effects in our department and in UW School of Medicine.

The personal well-being of my faculty, trainees and staff is my priority. I respect that some of you might need to grieve and be with your families and your communities. Please do not hesitate to reach out if I can support you.

I wish you all peace. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to support our community and for each of you. Thank you for the work you do.

With sadness and caring,  
Doug

*Douglas E. Wood, MD, FACS, FRCSEd  
The Henry N. Harkins Professor and Chair*

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"Last Saturday, I along with my husband Edwin Lindo, co-organized a march for justice, attracting nearly 10,000 healthcare workers. It all began from a letter I penned explaining my life experiences and encounters with racism. The protest was a beautiful sight. While I still do not consider a single march a win, to see healthcare workers recognizing the connection with their community and making the connection that health extends beyond the walls of hospitals and clinics is a start. It was inspiring to so many and allowed people to connect that we are all seeking to make our world better. While I may feel the stagnation of progress, I am speaking up for change, because I refuse to suffer in silence any longer and feel so fortunate to have a department that stands with me." *Dr. Estell Williams, Assistant Professor, Division of General Surgery*

"There is nothing radical about justice. What healthcare has committed itself to justice—providing the care that every individual deserves. This commitment is not just for the one patient, it's for the community that patient goes back to. When they are healthy, their community is healthy. What we saw on Saturday was over 10,000 healthcare workers demanding that all Black and Brown communities' health is protected from Racism and Police Violence. Again, this is not a radical statement, it's our job. We are proud to be in this work with you, but it did not end on Saturday. We all must continue to do the work at home, in our clinics and departments, and in the streets. That is what anti-racism and Justice require. I look forward to doing the work with you all!" *Edwin G. Lindo, Associate Director, Critical Teaching and Equity, Center For Leadership And Innovation in Medical Education (CLIME), UW School of Medicine*



"My faith in humanity was restored by seeing my UW Medicine and Department of Surgery family come out in droves in support of Black lives, in support of my life. I hope this is the beginning of the conversation; a conversation that is long overdue. A conversation that we should not be having in 2020." *Dr. Lara Oyetunji, Assistant Professor, Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery*

"Support for the protest to eradicate racism in our society was indeed appropriate and needed from all health professionals. Our support going forward to remove the structural barriers and eliminate the racial biases in our society is critically important along with an honest self-assessment and commitment to resolve our own health profession disparities and inequities. We must lead by example." *Dr. Ron Maier, Professor & Chief, Division of Trauma, Burn & Critical Care Surgery*



"This was a historic day for my family and for me. I have personally never marched for any cause but I felt it was important for our family to stand shoulder to shoulder with everyone to support our black friends and co-workers. Dr. Estell Williams said it best, "To be Silent is to be Complicit." This statement, coupled with the powerful imagery of George Floyd's murder and the inaction of the police just standing there profoundly affected me. We cannot be silent ever again." *Dr. Ben Starnes, Professor & Chief, Division of Vascular Surgery*



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"We are proud to join our fellow healthcare workers to march in protest of police violence and racism, and also to call attention to the persistent health disparities caused by institutional racism both within medicine and greater society. Furthermore, as parents we strive to emphasize to our son that it is imperative that we seek to actively dismantle the race-based system that simultaneously bestows unearned benefits to him while denying the same to others." *Dr. Melissa A. Herrin (Cardiothoracic Surgery R3)*



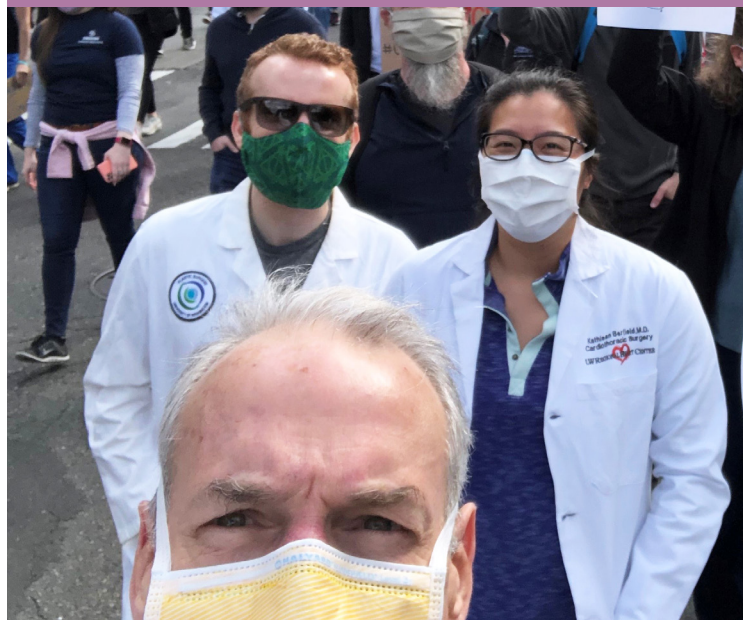
"This was a very moving event; peaceful, yet incredibly powerful. We all feel the need to stand up against racial injustice and systemic racism, and to demand real change. We are all in this together. I am so proud of Dr. Estell Williams for her leadership." *Dr. Nick Vedder, Professor & Chief, Division of Plastic Surgery (Pictured right with Dr. Ron Maier, Professor & Chief, Division of Trauma, Burn & Critical Care Surgery)*



"As surgeons, our impact extends beyond what is cut or sutured. It was inspiring to see members of our department come together for such an important issue." *Dr. Shane Morrison (Plastic Surgery Chief Resident) (Pictured back left)*

"So proud to be a part of the UW Department of Surgery and to march with my colleagues in Solidarity." *Dr. Kathleen Berfield, Assistant Professor, Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery (Pictured back right)*

"I am humbled to be reminded of my white privilege and ashamed by my unintentional complicity with institutional racism. The events of recent days and the solidarity of thousands of people demonstrating together inspires me to be deliberate and proactive in my own support of racial equality. I will not be complacent. I will not accept the status quo. I will be an ally with my black friends and colleagues." *Dr. Douglas E. Wood, The Henry N. Harkins Professor and Chair*



"It is important for me as a Seattle native to march and participate in protesting systemic racism in the city I love with the healthcare community. It's not just about protest, it's about change—changing the way we see, think and act. I see you and stand up for you." *Susan Marx, Department Director, Administration & Finance*



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"It's high time that we as a country face the issues of systemic racism and police brutality, the two of which are inextricably tied in our history. The protest was an important step in that direction, and serves as an inspiring call to action." *Dr. Arjune Dhanekula (Cardiothoracic Surgery R1)*



"The people in these photos, some I know, thousands that I do not, are publicly stating that it is time to recognize our own biases and move past them to ensure an equitable healthcare system and society at large that has equity as a centerpiece." *Dr. Jeffrey Friedrich, Professor, Division of Plastic Surgery*

