

# #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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