



Susan Marx

While I am proud to be an administrative leader in the Department of Surgery, which has history of leading change in diversity, equity and inclusion, I struggled to write this piece on diversity.

Recently, during our newly formed Anti-Racism Workgroup, comprised of staff, a question was raised: "How do we encourage Diversity in the Department of Surgery? The background behind this question is our team is currently hiring and while reviewing some of the resumes, I was wondering how diversity typically is included in the conversation of hiring someone. I'm typically not involved in the hiring process and am unsure how to bring it up to my manager since I am not sure if it is appropriate to mention this within our team. I think I am acutely aware of the lack of ethnic diversity within my team as the only non-white person. And while diversity encompasses many different areas, including ethnicity and culture, how heavily weighed is diversity, specifically ethnic diversity, when looking at a job applicant?"

My answer, similar to the question, focused on staff diversity: the honest answer is we have not centrally encouraged diversity through processes or communications to hiring managers. There are some units, such as the Surgical Outcomes Research Center (SORCE) which are ahead of the department, but as whole, we are not enabling processes that encourage diversity of staff.

Stating that truth out loud made me uncomfortable; acknowledging that the systems that are in place continue to remain mostly unchanged. I am supposed to be a leader, and purport to be an ally; yet, a straightforward set of questions shone a light on an obvious

DIVERSITY IN DOS

"REFLECTIONS ON SYSTEMIC RACISM"

gap to our BIPOC staff. It was a moment to own the issue, and commit to transparency and improvement.

What have I learned through participating in anti-racism workgroups and through diversity, equity and inclusion trainings: I can say with certainty that I embody white privilege – previously oblivious to the privileges I took for granted that others do not have access to. Like many white folks in recent months, George Floyd's murder made me sick; the protests here in Seattle gave me an entryway into action. I started searching for the stories, narratives and documentaries about black experience in America. The one that hit me with such sadness and sickness is "Say Her Name: The Life and Death of Sandra Bland." I started following anti-racism thought leaders on Twitter and Instagram. All of this to say, I am starting to learn, acknowledging and working through my discomfort, and starting to act. I have a long way to go on this path.

Part of that path is learning about others' paths, particularly BIPOC paths. What has also made me increasingly uncomfortable is the recent "Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping" issued by the White House on September 22, 2020. In the preamble, it states, "...many people are pushing a different vision of America that is grounded in hierarchies based on collective social and political identities rather than in the inherent and equal dignity of every person as an individual. This ideology is rooted in the pernicious and false belief that America is an irredeemably racist or sexist country; that some people, simply on account of their race or sex, are oppressors; and that racial and sexual identities are more important than our common status as human beings and Americans."

Further, "...unfortunately this malign ideology is now migrating from the fringes of American society and threatens to infect core institutions of our country." The Executive Order specifically calls out diversity training as the root cause of infection, and goes on to mandate that federal dollars will not be used to

support such activities that do not promote equality. In addition, contractors and agencies are supposed to report any training activities within the federal fiscal year 2020 within 90 days of the order date. A hotline to report non-compliance will be created.

We, at the UW, are part of the "academy" – the place where ideas and theories are discussed, argued and tested. Diversity training has become increasingly part of our lives as UW faculty, trainees or staff. As a white person, my view is that diversity training is meant to help take the blinders off, to see a reality that has been ignored, consciously or not. What do these reflections have to do with the Department of Surgery? It is common to hear that we should show up as our "authentic selves" in work and in life. I have realized that I like to solve problems; I like to understand how we got where we are and figure out how to remedy it. Institutional racism is a problem. I am a leader in an institution. How can I contribute to fixing the problems, instead of passively perpetuating systems that are broken or flawed, that continue to hurt others?

We at the University engage in research supported by federal funds, receive funding for graduate medical education, or bill for Medicare in a clinical setting – our professional lives are intertwined with federal support. I am angry; angry that the current administration is attempting to censor ideas. This is what keeps me up at night. I look forward to the next administration to remedy this Executive Order.

Author Brené Brown has stated in her books and podcasts: "I want to get it right not to be right." It's something that resonates with me from studying philosophy, specifically Socrates, "I know that I do not know." I want to cultivate curiosity, which includes learning uncomfortable truths and stories, so that I can contribute to dismantling systemic racism as it exists at the UW and in the United States of America.

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