

Talking Points: DEI Action Plan

- In October 2020, the UNC School of Medicine's Task Force on DEI and Social Justice compiled a report and list of recommendations for how we could further our DEI work, both as a part of our workplace culture and in our medical education curriculum...this report was posted on our SOM Office of DEI website...
- In January, these recommendations were the subject of an opinion piece posted online by The College Fix and subsequently covered by The Blaze.
- After these articles were posted, we received a number of calls...we responded quickly and individually to those who reached out...and I want to share that same information with you...
- First, portions of what was reported in the College Fix piece are misleading and sensationalized...and we have put together a response that walks through each section point by point...we think this can help set the record straight on what we are doing in these areas...we would be happy to share this document with you...
- We've also looked back at the plan posted to make sure it reflects the current status of our work in this area...
- Most recommendations were created as a response to concerns highlighted by our accreditation agency – the LCME...others were modified following their original posting or not adopted...
- I want to emphasize that the goal of our work in medical education is to train the next generation of healthcare providers to care for people from all backgrounds, reflecting our state's diverse population...and we are constantly refining our approach to make sure we are meeting that goal.

Key Messages

- **Our DEI initiative mirrors what is occurring in medical schools across the country.** A recent online article (College Fix) misrepresents and sensationalizes our great work at the UNC School of Medicine. Like all leading schools of medicine, we have prioritized and are proud of our work in DEI. It is imperative that we focus on this work as it allows us to meet our mission: to improve the health and well-being of North Carolinians.
- **The College Fix opinion article distorted the ways in which we encourage and prepare our faculty** to be better educators, researchers and health care providers. We want our faculty and students to be prepared to **compassionately care for all of North Carolina's population**, which is very diverse with diverse needs.
- **Our DEI efforts are not about professional advancement.** This is about training our physicians and researchers in their field. This effort has no political agenda; its sole purpose is to ensure that our entire community has the resources and access to high quality care and that we are meeting individual needs.
- **We need to ensure that our teaching and medical care represents current knowledge and practice.** Historically, race has been used as part of clinical diagnoses and decision making. This practice has been categorically disproven. However, this practice still occurs in some medical schools across the country, which contributes to on-going racial disparities in health care. But not here and at other leading schools of medicine. We use the most current research and practices in teaching medical students and caring for our patients.

Q: Many of the recommendations in the report are designed to promote anti-racism. Do you believe racism is pervasive among our students, faculty or staff?

A: It is more important to address ideas in medical education that have their roots in unconscious bias. For example, as recently as 2016, a study found that half of medical students and residents at another large public medical school agreed with at least one false statement about biological differences based on race, including that Black people have thicker skin and less sensitive nerve endings than white people. Beliefs like this lead to Black patients being prescribed less pain medication than white patients with similar conditions, another fact determined by research. Allowing these false teachings and beliefs to perpetuate is harmful to the care of all patients. The authors of that study even state that these beliefs are not the result of racist attitudes by individuals, but the product of false training and offensive stereotypes.

Q: The School of Medicine's Promotion and Tenure Guidelines suggest that social justice or DEI be added as a domain required for promotion for all faculty by 2024. Would this play a role in tenure determinations?

A. No. Engagement in and contribution to DEI efforts are considered broadly for tenure determinations. These efforts are conceptualized in the broadest context, and contributions may expand across research, teaching, service and clinical work.