

The recent events in our country are disturbing and demand action. The tragic and senseless deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, along with the deaths of Philando Castile, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, and many others have left an indelible mark on our nation. Unfortunately, it is another indelible mark, in a long line of indelible marks. While our nation has made progress since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's, sadly, here we are in 2020, struggling with the death of another black man at the hands of a white police officer, who swore to "protect and serve". The list has become disturbingly long. But even sadder, is the heightened state of conflict between those who have sworn to protect and serve, and those that challenge that oath.

To compound things, we are also dealing with a global pandemic that is claiming record-number lives, and devastating economies. Minorities historically suffer from health disparities and lack adequate or affordable access to health care. This medical emergency has laid bare the systemic conditions that have led to these disparities: higher prevalence of pre-existing conditions, lack of access to care, condensed work conditions. As a result, during the current pandemic, minority workers are more likely to be over-exposed, and we are seeing the devastating results in our own community. Over the last few months, in Durham County, we have seen a disproportionate increase in the number of confirmed cases among African-American and other minority populations, when compared to white and Asian populations. As an African-American male, all of this is deeply troubling, and hits particularly close to home. I want to stand together, discuss these issues, and move forward.

Camaraderie. Advocacy. Diversity. These are words within the Mission Statement of the Durham-Orange County Medical Society (DOCMS). Camaraderie is defined as friendly good fellowship, as well as mutual trust and friendship among people who spend a lot of time together. Advocacy is the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal. Diversity is defined as the inclusion of differing elements (variety); more specifically, different types of people (races, cultures, sexual orientation, etc.). If these three concepts are the foundation of the mission of our medical society, then we must hold fast, and stay true to our mission. We must not shy away from these issues. We must discuss them openly and in safe spaces. We must address them and come up with solutions to prevent further loss of life, perpetuation of racism and prejudice, and we must educate and enlighten.

We at the DOCMS will use our platform to address these issues, educate one another, our community, and advance solutions to move forward. We will work with our legislators through our state society, the NCMS, to address these social and health inequalities. We challenge you all to do the same, in your everyday lives. We cannot let fear, hatred, prejudice, or ignorance continue to erode our communities or our great nation.



As the Durham-Orange County Medical Society, we pledge to continue to do the following:

- To welcome ALL MD, DO, and PA clinicians into our professional midst
- To engage in dialogue that promotes respect for all members and all patients
- To examine our own unconscious biases
- To work actively to change the culture in a positive way
- To seek to engage our lawmakers to help them understand the real disparities that exist so that laws can be changed for the betterment of all
- To promote making healthcare accessible and affordable to all
- To educate our population on public health issues through media programs
- To use our educational platform at general meetings to address pertinent issues and promote healthy dialogue
- To continue to foster Camaraderie, Advocacy, and Diversity

Sincerely,

Ronnie Laney, MD, MPH

President, Durham-Orange County Medical Society

