

# Systemic racism and health disparities

## Statement from editors of family medicine journals

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The year 2020 has been marked by historic protests across the United States and the globe sparked by the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and so many other Black people. The protests heightened awareness of racism as a public health crisis and triggered an anti-racism movement. Racism is a pervasive and systemic issue that has profound adverse effects on health.<sup>1,2</sup> Racism is associated with poorer mental and physical health outcomes and negative patient experiences in the health care system.<sup>3,4</sup> As evidenced by the current coronavirus pandemic, race is a sociopolitical construct that continues to disadvantage Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other people of colour.<sup>5-8</sup> The association between racism and adverse health outcomes has been discussed for decades in the medical literature, including the family medicine literature. There is a renewed call to action for family medicine, a specialty that emerged as a counterculture to reform mainstream medicine,<sup>9</sup> to both confront systemic racism and eliminate health disparities. This effort will require collaboration, commitment, education, and transformative conversations around racism, health inequity, and advocacy so that we can better serve our patients and our communities.

The editors of several North American family medicine publications have come together to address this call to action and share resources on racism across our readerships. We acknowledge those members of the family medicine scholar community who have been fighting for equity consistent with the Black Lives Matter movement by writing about racism, health inequities, and personal experiences of practising as Black family physicians. While we recognize that much more work is needed, we want to amplify these voices. We have compiled a bibliography of scholarship generated by the family medicine community on the topic of racism in medicine. The collection can be accessed here: <https://www.annfammed.org/content/shared-bibliography-systemic-racism-and-health-disparities>.

While this list is not complete, it does include more than 250 published manuscripts and demonstrates expertise as well as a commitment to addressing these

complex issues. For example, in 2016, Dr J. Nwando Olayiwola, Chair of the Department of Family Medicine at Ohio State University in Columbus, wrote an essay on her experiences taking care of patients as a Black family physician.<sup>10</sup> In January of 2019, *Family Medicine* published an issue devoted to racism in education and training.<sup>11</sup> Dr Eduardo Medina, a family physician and public health scholar, co-authored a call to action in 2016 for health professionals to dismantle structural racism and support Black lives to achieve health equity. His recent 2020 article builds on that theme and describes the disproportionate deaths of Black people due to racial injustice and the COVID-19 pandemic as converging public health emergencies.<sup>12,13</sup> In the wake of these emergencies, a fundamental transformation is warranted, and family physicians can play a key role.

We, the editors of family medicine journals, commit to actively examining the effects of racism on society and health and to taking action to eliminate structural racism in our editorial processes. As an intellectual home for our profession, we have a unique responsibility and opportunity to educate and continue the conversation about institutional racism, health inequities, and anti-racism in medicine. We will take immediate steps to enact tangible advances on these fronts. We will encourage and mentor authors from groups underrepresented in medicine. We will ensure that content includes an emphasis on cultural humility, diversity and inclusion, implicit bias, and the effects of racism on medicine and health. We will recruit editors and editorial board members from groups underrepresented in medicine. We will encourage collaboration and accountability within our specialty to confront systemic racism through content and processes in all of our individual publications. We recognize that these are small steps in an ongoing process of active anti-racism, but we believe these steps are crucial. As editors in family medicine, we are committed to progress toward equity and justice. 🌱

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