



## CORRESPONDENCE

# Reply to Drs. Hart and Cadet: we agree—the challenges of increasing equity, diversity and inclusion include societal issues and actions now are vital

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We welcome the correspondence from Drs. Hart and Cadet [1] and agree with its premise: “Actions Speak Louder than Words: Increasing Black ACNP Membership”. As expressed in our commentary, the pace of progress is unacceptably slow, particularly regarding Black and Native American membership. This is not for lack of commitment and effort, but with the exception of women and, to a lesser extent, “Hispanic/Latino” persons, diversity has not substantially increased, though there is reason to hope inclusiveness of meetings and the organization have progressed. Our recommendations included expanded efforts to recruit minorities and Black scientists in particular; employing strategies to better understand the effects of such efforts on perceptions of equity and inclusion; and better tracking the diversity of membership, meeting attendees, leadership, and inclusion [2].

The challenge is enormous. As Drs. Hart and Cadet note, “racial discrimination... is a pernicious component of life in the US” and this likely contributes to “the low number of Black members.” Indeed, pervasive discrimination applies to many nonwhite people, reducing opportunities and creating barriers to science careers. Moreover, the “pipeline problem” is no longer an acceptable excuse for lack of progress; other paths must be explored [2, 3].

It is visually apparent that meeting participation has become more diverse and the program more relevant to minority issues, including recognition that racism contributes to health care disparities and other health problems. This has been a goal of coordinated committee and Task Force efforts. For example, instructions for annual meeting panels/workshop submissions state that they may be rejected for failing to include women, minority and/or early-career scientists/clinicians, and speakers from diverse institutions. However, the impact of such efforts [e.g., 2, 4] on climate/inclusivity are not systematically measured. Thus, how well current efforts are working to increase meeting attendee perceptions that ACNP is equitable, inclusive, and relevant to their professional aspirations and values, is not known. We need to better understand what fosters the desire of meeting attendees to seek and accept nominations for membership.

This touches on another point by Drs. Hart and Cadet who ask: “why Black scientists would even want to become ACNP members” and the important “aim to address societal issues that unjustly, uniquely, or disproportionately impact Black people.” We couldn’t agree more! More concerted efforts must be applied to recruiting Black scientists and others, and in creating a climate of inclusion to retain them [3, 4]. These efforts should be guided by actively assessing their impact on equity and inclusion and feelings that ACNP membership is culturally and professionally relevant.

For example, the College on Problems of Drug Dependence Underrepresented Populations Committee launched a new

diversity survey in July 2020, asking respondents about feelings of inclusion [5]. A premise of that effort and implicit here is that increasing diversity should not just aim to increase numbers but to create a diverse lens to view societal issues resulting from inequity and injustice. This is exactly why diversity is needed to achieve scientific excellence and innovation.

The increasing diversification of ACNP’s leadership over the past decade is an encouraging sign that reflects the support of the membership and the urgency of this topic as raised by Drs. Hart and Cadet. Such open and honest discussion as reflected in this exchange would seem to be a step in the right direction.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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