



Message from ACMG President: overcoming disparities

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Genetics in Medicine (2020) 22:1758; <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41436-020-0882-6>

Dear colleagues,

The Golden Rule is simple: “Treat others as you would want them to treat you”.

George Floyd’s death represents the antithesis of this basic human tenet. Racism exists in America. Many of us have experienced it or observed it. Over the past weeks, issues of racism have dominated our nightly newscasts and our conversations. We all understand there is no simple solution to these challenging issues. However, as President of the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics (ACMG) let me state our position and describe our path forward.

The ACMG vehemently opposes racism and supports all efforts to more fully understand and address the factors that lead not only to disparities in justice, but also those that lead to disparities in health-care delivery and access. The ACMG supports peaceful protest. The gains in health care brought on by advances in genetics and genomics technology and their introduction to clinical practice belong to all of humanity, not only the employed, insured, or wealthy.

The ACMG Board of Directors recently appointed Board member Dr. Katy Phelan as Diversity Advocate. She will lead a Committee on Diversity whose scope and goals will include examining whether medical ethical principles are equally applied across ACMG and will make recommendations on how best to ensure that these principles are fulfilled. A major focus will be the ethical principle of justice. For example, the College recently acknowledged that the 23 variants recommended for cystic fibrosis carrier screening allow 90% detection in Northern European Caucasians and 95%

detection in the Ashkenazi Jewish. However, these variants fall far short of 90% detection when applied to African Americans. In an age of genome sequencing it is entirely plausible to reach 90% detection in these other groups and we should strive to do so. Dr. Josh Deignan is leading a work group charged with addressing the inequity surrounding cystic fibrosis carrier screening. The Committee on Diversity will make suggestions to the Board of Directors that focus on the principle of justice and its three components—equity, equality, and need.

We have all witnessed in our lifetime single events that spark emotions that quickly dissipate. The events unfolding over these past few weeks demand our attention, action, and sustained change. I want to encourage all members of ACMG to communicate directly with the forthcoming Committee on Diversity. We want to encourage you to share your ideas and solutions that might be applied to disparities and will provide more information on how you can get involved. Make these past few weeks meaningful by ensuring that your emotions never fade.

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DISCLOSURE

A.R.G. declares no conflicts of interest.

Publisher’s note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

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Submitted 12 June 2020; revised 12 June 2020; accepted: 15 June 2020

Published online: 30 June 2020