Dentistry as Participant and Casualty of Racism and Bias in Medicine: Moving Toward Equity in Health Care

Elena M Francisco, MS, RDHAP, Staff, Pacific Center for Equity in Oral Health Care, Director, RDHAP Program, University of the Pacific, Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry

Elisa M Chávez, Professor, Diagnostic Sciences, Director, Pacific Center for Equity in Oral Health Care, University of the Pacific, Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry

PURPOSE
A symposium was convened to learn about racism and bias in health care and work toward more inclusive practices. The gathering explored structural disparities in oral health care through the intersection of racism, ageism, ableism, sexism/gender bias and other inequities as they have occurred in medicine and contributed to disparities in oral health and oral health care within healthcare. Creating a more inclusive dental office and healthcare environment can encourage oral health care for people who would otherwise not feel welcome into a dental practice.

RESULTS
With the guidance of the speakers and faculty facilitators, each round table identified opportunities, resources and strategies to enrich their personal growth, overcome barriers to care in their own practices, work environments and communities as well as more broadly across the system of health care through public policy.

Sample Question Reflection: Action Plan Session
• Discuss one or more ways in which you can change your thoughts, actions, or environment to address biases you have identified in your own life or practice.
• Based on the presentation you heard today, discuss the beliefs or systems that have contributed to racism and bias in oral health care and inequities toward dentistry.

APPRAOCH
Experts in the historical context of structural disparities in healthcare that result from racism and bias shared their knowledge with an interdisciplinary group of professionals. Program attendees participated in round table discussions, sharing current practice status, barriers and strategies for change to decrease bias in practice.

Sample Round Table Questions:
Identifying and Challenging
• How diverse is your team? Is there a difference between positions, i.e. allied staff different from professional staff?
• Based on the presentation you heard today, discuss the beliefs or systems that have contributed to racism and bias in oral health care and inequities toward dentistry.

CONCLUSION
• Speakers and participants were highly motivated to discuss and work through the barriers created by systemic racism.
• Starting from a better understanding of their own biases, they considered their own practices and how they might create barriers that were unintended.
• Identified actions, changes and policies needed to break down long standing structural barriers to care in their communities.
• Resources were identified to help participants begin their journey toward more inclusive practices in oral health care and broader inclusion of oral health care as part of the healthcare system.
• Racism and Bias in Dentistry: A Call to Action and Planning for Change was created and shared with the symposium participants and posted for public view.

REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS


For complete list of references and resources visit https://dental.pacific.edu/dental/faculty-and-research/research-facilities.php

We want to acknowledge the symposium speakers: Dr. Mary Lomas-Ghaidussi, Dr. Keith Norris, Dr. Christine Wesseler, Dr. Anna Chodos, Dr. Irene Aninye, Dr. Raul Garcia

Funding source: University of the Pacific, Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry