

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

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## 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.*

## Course Evaluation Responses

*“Very innovative topics which had broad based appeal. New information was valuable, especially on ageism.”*

*“I wish I had been given the breakout session prompts prior to the beginning of the session. It was really hard for me to come up with commentary on policy on the spot.”*

*“I loved the format of the program. The round table discussions and work groups were excellent. Great collaborative opportunities.”*

## APPROACH

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

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

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