

The Department of Surgery Statement on Racism, Disparities, and our Commitment to Diversity

It has been two weeks since the horrific murder of George Floyd, one of the more recent and visible victims of social injustice and racism in our nation. While his death has affected each of us differently, it has prompted many necessary and difficult conversations about individual, institutional, and structural racism, bigotry, and hate.

We, as a Department of Surgery, oppose racism and hate, in all forms. We recognize racism, prejudice, discrimination, and intolerance of others as a public health crisis of special importance to those of us in medicine. We live and work in an incredibly diverse city; one that has its own history of racism and segregation, as many other urban communities do, the effects of which we see in the health of our patients. We continue to see the impact of urban violence and of disparities in access to care. This has been highlighted most recently in the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 in the Black and Hispanic communities of Milwaukee. We are committed to working to improve these disparities with our community partners across Southeast Wisconsin through clinical research focused on patient outcomes and healthcare disparities, clinical trials, and community engagement programs, such as 414LIFE and the STEPS program.

We are also deeply committed to the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion in our own department, including faculty, residents, fellows, advanced practice providers, and staff. We recognize the benefit to our department and to our patients that the inclusion of traditionally marginalized groups and voices brings to the table. Over the last few years, the Department has taken a number of measures to address bias and improve equity and diversity. Some of these measures include:

- Faculty recruitment. Guiding principles for faculty recruitment to include a standardized and transparent recruitment process. Every faculty recruitment benefits from a 3-5 member recruitment committee, comprised of members of the Division, Department, and multidisciplinary members external to the Department of Surgery. This helps ensure that diverse candidates of unique perspectives and experiences are identified, interviewed, and hired.
- Faculty retention. Development of a Mentorship Committee for Assistant Professors to include fair and transparent processes for professional development, promotion, and tenure.
- In 2019, The Department of Surgery joined the #IWILLMCW campaign with this pledge: “We pledge to achieve and maintain equity and diversity among faculty and staff, to reinforce professional workplace standards, and to optimize patient care and health equity” and members completed Implicit-Association Testing. These results are being used to create departmental initiatives and programs to address implicit bias.
- In late 2019, The General Surgery Residency program made the decision to partner with SurgWise, a third-party consulting company that creates customized screening and interview processes for residency applicants, based on structured interviews with current residents and faculty. Use of these solutions will enhance the equity and effectiveness of the residency selection process.
- New this year, we have joined the “Promise Coalition”, a longitudinal partnership with Departments of Surgery across the country to realize everyone’s academic and professional potential.
- In the upcoming academic year, we will initiate a “Cultural Complications Curriculum”, based on modules created at the University of Michigan. The aim of these sessions is to understand how bias and prejudice can influence how we care for patients, interact with each other, and educate our learners.

We realize that this may not be enough. It is the beginning of a continuous process that will require input and feedback from everyone in the department, as we learn from each other and from our mistakes, as well as from our successes.

Join us in becoming active listeners and learners of the social injustices in our society and in becoming allies and advocates for change. We will have a list of resources available for those who are interested.

Thank you for your continued commitment to our academic, educational, and clinical missions and for the dedication you bring every day to the care of our patients.