

Statement from members of the University of Chicago Department of Surgery

Background:

Given President Trump's recent [Executive Order \(EO\) on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping](#) released Sept. 22, 2020, we are pledging our support for the [American Association for Medical Colleges' \(AAMC\) statement in response](#). While this EO has some elements that are universally supported, other aspects remain troubling and are at best, unclear and confusing by misrepresenting the true purpose of diversity training. This EO has already had the intended effect of broad cancellations of diversity training in federal agencies, for federal contractors, and in federally-assisted grant programs at a time when demand for such training across the country is at an all-time high.

The President's EO calls diversity training "divisive" and "un-American" with a specific emphasis on eliminating the dissemination of critical race theory. [Critical race theory advanced theoretical understandings of the law, politics, and American sociology that focused on the efforts of white people (Euro-Americans) to maintain their historical advantages over people of color. It is a theoretical framework in the social sciences that examines society and culture as they relate to categorizations of race, law, and power. It is a social philosophy that argues that social problems are influenced and created more by societal structures and cultural assumptions than by individual and psychological factors.] The EO, which threatens free speech, serves to eliminate evidence-based concepts such as "structural racism", "white privilege" or "implicit bias" and instead argues that individuals should be judged based on individual merit, devoid of any historical or social context.

We believe that:

1. Diversity training is not divisive material. Rather, it helps clinicians and surgeons understand the legacy of racism that has existed in this country for over 400 years, leading to inequities in health outcomes that persist to this day. Past-president of the American Public Health Association Dr. Camara Jones has, in fact, identified structural racism, the 'myth of meritocracy', being 'a-historical' and a narrow focus on the individual over structures as clear barriers to achieving health equity.
2. If institutions follow this EO, necessary conversations will not be allowed to occur and health equity cannot be realized. These evidence-informed conversations are especially salient given the disparities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing protests related to police brutality across the country. There is no better field than health care to be leaders in these urgent discussions and training, given the direct impact physicians can have on our trainees, colleagues, patients, families, communities and society at large.
3. We re-iterate the AAMC's contention that the central purpose of diversity and inclusion training is, in fact, to bring the country together, not to further divide it. This is done by learning our collective histories, identifying our biases – both conscious and unconscious, and understanding structural harm that propagates societal inequities.

4. We, the undersigned at the University of Chicago, like the AAMC, commit to deepening our training and learning about diversity, equity and inclusion, to learning about our rich cultures in our pluralistic society, to understanding the roles of structures on outcomes and to re-affirm our commitment to engaging in anti-racist endeavors.
5. We commit to continuing our efforts of pursuing and even increasing such training in diversity, equity and inclusion.
6. We urge other similar institutions, departments of surgery and other affected organizations to do the same.

Diversity training has been demonstrated to be effective for cognitive, behavioral and attitudinal learning especially when complemented by other diversity initiatives, targeted to both awareness and skills development, and conducted over a significant period of time. It is an important tool to address health inequities and to heal our nation by learning about our collective, interwoven histories.

Signed,

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