

Email to Medical Students, 17 June 2020

As a Medical School, we wish to acknowledge the particular concerns of medical students around the issues highlighted by the Black Lives Matter movement. The response of many medical students has shone new light on these issues and we welcome the opportunity to examine closely what we as a Medical School have done, and should do to address these issues and concerns. We are resolved to work with students in making a concerted effort to address the concerns of our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community.

Some of that work has already begun. In 2017, the General Medical Council report on the Queen's Medical School stated that *'Equality and diversity issues must be better integrated into the curriculum'*. Our ongoing work-streams since then include:

- The appointment of a lead for Equality and Diversity within the curriculum.
- A new workshop on diversity and cultural competence within communication skills is included in the C25 curriculum, which will be launched in September 2020.
- Training on unconscious bias and embedded reflection on equality and diversity issues through the portfolio.
- Changes in dermatology teaching to ensure adequate representation of all skin types in teaching examples. This is not straightforward, but clearly needs addressing. A simulation moulage group including representation of skin disease in BAME individuals has been formed across our Faculty.
- Within clinical skills we have provided manikins and artificial limbs of different skin colours (where such equipment is available), and a commitment to ensure that future purchases reflect ethnic diversity. Recognising how important particular clinical signs present in people of colour will be included in future teaching.
- We have been encouraging a greater diversity of simulated patients for clinical skills training and OSCEs through advertising to relevant local groups. As you know in Northern Ireland, BAME residents make up less than 2% of the population so this is not easy to remedy. Specific diversity training has been delivered to our simulated patients this year.
- We have reviewed our dress code after consultation with BAME students.

But we need to go much further:

- The new C25 curriculum provides an opportunity to integrate diversity teaching. People from different ethnic groups along with some of their specific health problems are represented in Case Based Learning. The 'G' or 'Global and Population Health' helical theme will emphasise issues such as ethnicity and discrimination as determinants of health, and give voice to important historical injustice in medical practice. This theme threads through the entire curriculum from year 1 to 5.
- We will implement the key recommendations of the BMA Racial Harassment Charter including Bystander Training.

In all of these endeavours and others, we will seek to include students and members of the public in advising what and how changes should be made.

We are committed to keeping students safe. We recognise the fears expressed by many as evidence has emerged suggesting that BAME individuals in healthcare professions are at higher risk of death due to COVID-19. Such events are often associated with multiple risk factors - thankfully these associated risk factors are less prevalent amongst medical students. As the Medical Schools Council (MSC) points out *"Fortunately, most medical students are in an age group where their risk of serious illness as a result of COVID 19 is low"*. We are currently planning our own risk assessment process for return to placements later this year, aligned to the principles set out by MSC. We are working closely with colleagues in the Department of Health and Trusts/General Practice to ensure that suitable PPE is available for all students.

Emotional and psychological 'safety' in all learning environments, including clinical placement, is also vital. We have a well-established 'Raising Concerns' process. Any concerns about racial discrimination of any kind should be raised through the 'bullying and undermining' route available on <https://www.med.qub.ac.uk/portal/prof/concerns.aspx> Students have raised similar concerns in the past and we have been able to deal with them.

Last week, members of the University's senior management team met with student representatives from the African-Caribbean Society. Following this meeting, the Vice-Chancellor has issued the following communication. The Vice-Chancellor has highlighted the University's commitment to the Race Equality Charter, which provides a specific framework for improving the representation, progression and success of BAME staff and students within higher education. Furthermore, the Vice-Chancellor has given a commitment to continued close collaboration with our BAME staff and students across the University, as we take forward specific actions focused on addressing the very real concerns of our BAME community.

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