

**Subject:** Message from the Dean: Juneteenth  
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## Tulane University School of Medicine Message From The Dean

19 June 2020

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Our Tulane community has been distressed and saddened by the crises of 2020: The COVID19 pandemic, the resultant economic upheaval and social turmoil, and a series of incidents exhibiting the continued racism and human rights violations occurring in our nation. The coronavirus crisis has disproportionately affected the Black community, with vastly higher rates of infection, greater severity of disease and deaths. Now more than ever, we need to have empathy for each other, extend kindness to one another, and put in the work required to learn about and truly understand one another.

The murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks and so many other Black citizens seem to have finally shaken society to its core and opened our eyes to the true requirements of being more than mere bystanders, but upstanders and true allies. We seem to finally recognize the societal contributors to racism and are embracing the wave of change – and concurrent work - necessary to bring about real reform. Peaceful protests are a crucial piece of this intricate puzzle, including the White Coats for Black Lives demonstration organized by our students last week on the downtown medical campus to demonstrate solidarity against racial injustice. They were joined by administrators, faculty, staff, students and trainees from all disciplines and all campuses – and I am proud of our students for taking an active stand, for their cross-campus inclusiveness, and for possessing the courage to speak up and deliver a powerful, peaceful message.

To that end, I want this message to be crystal clear from the School of Medicine leadership:

*Black Lives Matter.*

Today is Juneteenth, a day for celebration and reflection about where we have been, the progress that has been and remains to be made, and of personal accountability and commitment to how we will be part of that progress. The Emancipation Proclamation declaring all slaves freed became effective on January 1st, 1863, but in the days before widespread media and communication it was two and a half years before word spread to distant southern states. News of emancipation finally reached the far-reaching states of Texas and Louisiana on June 19th, 1865, and ever since that day “Juneteenth” has been

celebrated as a commemoration of true emancipation for Black citizens. It is recognized as a state holiday or special day of recognition in 47 states (including Louisiana - since the year 2003).

While celebrating the advancement made on this day, we must also recognize the long path toward true equity that lies ahead. Our students have spoken loudly, clearly and passionately of their belief that the responsibility that comes with their white coats includes a commitment to social responsibility and activism against injustice. The leadership of the School of Medicine supports that belief, and are all committed to working alongside our students, faculty and staff as we collectively identify and implement the next steps forward. One of the first of many steps will be the identification of a new collective tentatively called the "TUSOM Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Coalition," with a broad and diverse membership drawn from all levels of the SoM.

We understand that it requires more than statements and protests alone to create enduring and meaningful change. We understand that it will not happen over the course of days, weeks, or even the next few years. Sustained outcomes require consistent attention and a willingness to examine and question all aspects of policy and practice. It may not be an easy path – and in fact, it may be painful at times - but there can be no middle ground when it comes to our institutional commitment against racism. We recognize that we are not yet where we should be as a school and that we must do better. We will do better.

Action without understanding can be directionless, and in searching for a way forward, I refer back to the foundational pillars we use in teaching: Discover, Learn and Heal. We must keep listening to DISCOVER what we do not know. We must apply what we LEARN to move towards the goal of racial equity and inclusion. Moreover, we must support initiatives that help HEAL our world.

We will continue to update you on action items and initiatives targeting opportunities for dialogue, engagement, and change. As I close this message, I want to leave you each with a specific charge: think about the ways that you personally, and Tulane as an institution, can foster a more diverse and inclusive community. Share those ideas with us and commit to doing your part to implement them.

I wish you all the best as we celebrate Juneteenth and Father's Day and encourage you to fully embrace the Tulane DNA that binds us all. As never before, we need to be true to our core values, which are:

*Accountability, Compassion, Collaboration, Integrity, Creativity, Quality, and Diversity.*

L. Lee Hamm, M.D.  
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The James R. Doty Distinguished Professor and Chair  
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