



# Equality and Inclusion: You Commented, and We're Listening

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**O**n June 2, we tweeted: *The American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) is saddened by the pain and conflict in our cities as a result of the tragic death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, one incident among too many. ASA abhors racism. We stand with our colleagues in organized medicine and the broader health care community who assert that racism undermines public health. It cannot be ignored and must be addressed for the safety, fairness, justice, and health of everyone. We hope for calm, peace, and reconciliation throughout the nation.*

We appreciate the insightful comments that resulted from this tweet. ASA remains committed to addressing diversity and inclusion in the specialty and in medicine. As a professional society, we are working to eradicate bias in terms of skin color, gender, sexual orientation, or religious or political beliefs. ASA strives to be a welcoming, inclusive organization. Having different viewpoints at the table makes us better, stronger, and more able to deliver quality care and be a better voice in advocating for the specialty and our patients.

Though significant work remains to be done, much is happening behind the scenes to address equality. Here's a snapshot of the progress ASA members in elected leadership positions have been shepherding to help broaden the scope of inclusivity in our specialty.

## Diversifying Leadership to Improve the Specialty

ASA has a plethora of committees, with over 1,200 committee members in total. To achieve diversity in the composition of committee members and our plenary and keynote speakers, ASA has been working to refine the committee selection process to ensure that equally qualified candidates are represented with regard to gender, race, age, type of practice, and U.S. location. We've achieved significant results with regard to gender. Roughly 38% of ASA committee members are now women, which is higher than ASA's membership (34%); although it is higher in academic medicine, which has a strong influence in many of our committees involved with the annual meeting. Over the past three years, our

Committee on Annual Meeting Oversight has been chaired by women.

## Creating a Network of Inclusion: Committee on Professional Diversity

ASA understands that our organization, and our specialty, will be more successful when the viewpoints of all members are recognized. "ASA, as with any great organization, has to be mindful of continuing to groom diverse members for elected leadership positions," says Claude Brunson, MD, MS, CPE, FASA, who served on the ASA Board of Directors from 2001 to 2018 and founded the ASA's Committee on Professional Diversity. The goal of the Committee on Professional Diversity is to create an organization that is welcoming as we incorporate professional diversity and development of physicians across the broad reach of ASA.

The Committee on Professional Diversity is committed to moving forward in collaboration with the membership to incorporate new, inclusive measures to meet the needs of all members for your professional development. When you feel welcome because your viewpoint is recognized, you're more likely to get involved and take on the challenges of a leadership position. Serving on an ASA committee can open doors. "My decision to seek out membership on the Committee on Professional Diversity has been a life-changing experience," says Vilma Joseph, MD, Associate Professor of Anesthesiology at Albert Einstein College of Medicine. Dr. Joseph, who is also president of the New York State Society of Anesthesiologists, served on the ASA Committee on Professional Diversity when U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams, MD, FASA, chaired the committee six years ago. "Academically, I have been able to pursue research with the support of the committee, including publishing an article on the impact of socioeconomic status on perioperative adverse outcomes by looking at the NACOR database. In addition, the committee was instrumental in allowing me to publish about the accomplishments, struggles, and advice of minority female pioneers in anesthesiology. The ability to produce research and have the sponsorship of various

committee chairs, including Drs. Adams, Wright and Elizabeth Rebello, and speak at the ASA annual meeting, has allowed me to advance to the position of Professor of Anesthesiology at my institution," Dr. Joseph says.

## Shedding Light on Compensation Inequity

Starting as an ad hoc committee, ASA's Committee on Women in Anesthesia became a permanent standing committee in October 2019. Since its inception, committee members have developed educational programs for the ASA annual meeting and at the practice management conference on topics of particular interest to women. "One of the most important things we've done was look at issues of compensation disparities for women," says committee chair Linda Hertzberg, MD, FASA. A survey on compensation trends distributed to all ASA members found that "compared with male anesthesiologists, female anesthesiologists have a 13.8% higher probability of reporting compensation less than \$350,000 after adjusting for the other model covariates."

"We showed that women are compensated less than men in aggregate – in private practice and in academics. This is not ASA's problem. It's everyone's problem," Dr. Hertzberg says. As a consequence of the results of this survey, ASA, with the help of the Committee on Women in Anesthesia, drafted the "Statement on Compensation Equity Among Anesthesiologists," which was approved by the ASA House of Delegates on October 23, 2019 ([asamonitor.pub/3cJ2HPY](https://asamonitor.pub/3cJ2HPY)).

"This is the sort of thing that has to happen to level the playing field," Dr. Hertzberg says. "If the ASA says this is the ideal, whether it's compensation equity or treatment of people of different races in hiring, it gives members something to point to. It's time for the ASA to take a stand on more of these issues."

## Supporting Members of Diverse Backgrounds to Improve Patient Outcomes

ASA's Mentoring Grant Program has helped fund important research. The mentoring program has developed ro-



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bustly, allowing leaders within ASA to mentor medical students, residents, and anesthesia fellows of diverse backgrounds. The goal of the mentoring grant program is to provide funding to meaningful basic science, clinical, education, and advocacy-related research. The mentees from diverse backgrounds also gain experience as they are mentored by ASA leaders.

## Sparking an Interest in Medical Careers

Each year, ASA members visit a school in the city where the annual meeting is held to introduce medicine and the specialty of anesthesiology to minority students. Anesthesiologists meet with kids in their classrooms and to tell their stories. Despite the potential impact of COVID-19 on the classroom experience, ASA's Back to School program will continue to contribute to the pipeline of increasing minority participation in health care careers. Only 8.9% of U.S. physicians identify as an underrepresented minority, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges.

## We Want to Hear from You

While we continue to address systematic inequality and diversity within our society and in medicine, we recognize that more needs to be done. We invite you to share your feedback and ideas: What more should we be doing to help address diversity within our specialty? We welcome your recommendations and comments. Please send them to [diversity@asahq.org](mailto:diversity@asahq.org). Together, we can make ASA a model of inclusivity in organized medicine. ■