

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

We want to join our voices with many departments here at UNC Hospitals, UNC School of Medicine, and the UNC Campus. There have been incredibly powerful words and stories shared. The tragic murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor make it hard to find words to express the anger, frustration, and disgust that accompany any reflection on this most recent string of senseless violence and racist acts. The uncertainty of the accompanying global pandemic has made all of us weary with the realization that this virus and the resultant upheaval in society is going to be here for a while.

As staff, students and alumni involved within the Office of Rural Initiatives, we are acutely aware that while the full picture remains unclear, the disproportionate burden that our rural communities, mainly **Black and Latino Americans**, are bearing is directly tied to their overrepresentation in jobs where they risk exposure, and of a racial gap in wealth and income that has led to increased vulnerabilities of lay-offs. Our **Black and Latino workers**, who comprise a large portion of our rural populations, are overrepresented among the essential, the unemployed, and the dead. Within the destructive path this virus has already left on our nation, particularly those of color, it is incredibly challenging to be so acutely reminded of the path of systemic and embedded racism continues to leave.

Let us state clearly: our team and our campus partners within the Office of Rural Initiatives strongly condemns violence, discrimination, and racism. We commit to acknowledging and addressing the injustices that some of our friends and colleagues endure. We vow to not feel despondent and remain complacent, but rather to use the resources available to us to create and advocate for change. Although we are being exposed to humanity's worst tendencies, we pledge to show our best.

To our **Black and Brown students**; We see you. We stand with you. We support you. We share in your grief and anger. We commit to making your learning experience at UNC an inclusive environment in which you can thrive. We pledge to bring accountability and continue to learn and become strong voices in advocacy and allyship. We ask if you are OK. If you are not, we are here and can talk or direct you to extra counseling and to the proper members in the institution with a diversity related counseling skill set.

We would also like to share the recent repositioning of the Office of Rural Initiatives within the School of Medicine. We are now under the leadership of the Office of Inclusive Excellence (OIE). Our colleagues in the OIE are already teaching us and we are eager to listen and learn and strengthen the ORI's outreach and efforts. We are hopeful about the impact this new relationship and positioning will have in connecting students across programs.

To all; Check on each other, reach out for help, report concerns or incidents; we will not tolerate injustices. Put some thought into what you as an individual can do to address injustice, hate, and inequality. By doing so, you will emit hope, which is the only way to see light amid darkness.