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“What does jaundice really look like in black skin?”: Students and faculty driving change across the institution

What does jaundice really look like in black skin? It was an Oregon Health & Science University student who asked this question to a faculty member who identifies as a white female whom we will refer to as Michelle Round, Ph.D., R.N. (pseudonym). Readily available digital photographs of jaundice and other visible conditions that health care professionals need to recognize often do not reflect the diversity of our patient populations. As a result, Dr. Round began gathering photos that fully reflect diverse populations and using them in her teaching but was uncomfortable with the idea that she was the only person with access to these images.



Round first presented her dilemma to an educational community at OHSU as an innovative scholarly activity. She submitted a poster entitled, “Increasing the diversity of images used in teaching” to OHSU’s “Symposium on Educational Excellence.” I attended the poster session and read her work. As a result of her poster presentation, she received an invitation to speak during Education Grand Rounds, which is a series of interactive development sessions for all faculty, staff, residents, and students interested in the teaching and learning at OHSU. While I was not an attendee, multiple faculty shared their positive reviews of her presentation. One of the faculty suggested that this initiative move from the work of an individual faculty member to an institutional level including securing funding to develop our digital asset management system to curate a repository of diverse images. I convened a meeting of clinical and non-clinical collaborators from across OHSU to discuss a broader initiative. In this scenario, one student question eventually led to the convening of a cross-departmental team of librarians, faculty, and administrators coming together to brainstorm solutions.

In February 2019, the OHSU Library applied for and received \$12,000 in Pacific Northwest Region Health Sciences Library Partnership Award grant funds from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine to develop an openly available and centralized resource for visualizing pathophysiologic conditions in diverse populations. Through this collection OHSU faculty, students, and staff submit photos, create metadata, and learn about digital image copyright and distribution. The repository will increase awareness of issues around health and diversity and allow for a more inclusive, realistic lens by which to administer health professions education and healthcare at OHSU, and, eventually, other institutions.

For those readers who are not within clinical environments, I hope that this story causes you to think about how you respond to students' concerns of equity in the classroom. How can we do a better job of allowing marginalized voices to be heard – encouraged, even – and elevated at all levels of our institutions? What have our students asked that may require us to take action? How can we engage students and our faculty as change agents for equity? Are you up for the challenge?

Advocates

1. The challenge requires us to talk about our barriers to excellence in education in traditional and non-traditional venues. Not only at our internal faculty meetings but also at local, regional and national meetings. We need to take our challenges into productive spaces for problem solving to occur.
2. Persistence: We may have to state the problem and potential solutions to numerous audiences more than once. Perhaps it is a negative reflection on me, but I did not move toward action until I learned of the need multiple times in multiple ways. Persistence can move leaders to action even if the action is convening a brainstorming session.

Leaders

1. Develop your networks so that when problems arise you know who to bring to the table. Continue to develop relationships with individuals at your institution and across your institution's missions. Whether you are introvert or extrovert, find opportunities to enjoy tea or coffee with a faculty member and/or attend a lecture in another department.
2. Sometimes developing solutions to complex problems requires no more than a calendar invitation to get you started.

I am proud of the work the OHSU community has done. If I can support equity in education by bringing the right voices to the table maybe next year our faculty will not only teach but also assess whether or not our students know what jaundice looks like in all colors of skin.