Meet Shaila Kotadia, PhD, the new Director of Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) for the School of Medicine, whose new role is focused specifically on providing support to all SoM staff. Prior to this role, Dr. Kotadia started at Stanford in 2018 as the Director of Culture and Inclusion in the Office of Faculty Development and Diversity, where she focused on the integration of diversity, equity, and inclusion activities across all constituencies in the School of Medicine from students through faculty and implemented school-wide strategy and planning.

Q: Congratulations on your new role! Tell us a little about the new role and what you’ll be doing.

A: In this newly created role, I am serving as the Director of Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) and will be on the Talent Management team in the School of Medicine Human Resources Group (HRG). I will be helping to build the School’s capacity to do JEDI work and seek to dismantle bias in our systems, processes and procedures. I aim to provide strategic support to departments and teams, and individual support to staff, whether it be sharing resources, collaborating, or listening to their direct experiences and needs. Through this direct engagement with staff, I look forward to gaining a better understanding of the issues that staff are facing so that I can work to address them. Overarching all of this, I plan to create strong connections with Stanford University and Stanford Medicine’s JEDI efforts to ensure we collaborate, align and share resources across the enterprise.

Q: What personally motivates you to do justice and equity work?

A: I believe it’s my lifetime of experiences that motivated me to move into justice and equity work. My parents are immigrants from India, and growing up, it was a balance between two cultures having been born and raised in the U.S. and being a child of immigrants. In school, I went from being one of the only students of color to being a minority of minorities in high school. As a scientist, I began to understand that the culture was shaped by those with privilege, predominantly white male privilege, which meant that women of color faced numerous barriers. As I have progressed through my life and career, I have also learned to recognize and own the power and privilege that I have and use it to challenge myself and our systems. As I continuously self-reflect on what brought me here, it is the need to change these environments so that diverse individuals can feel a strong sense of belonging and reach their full potential through a just and equitable system.

Q: You mentioned that you worked in science, but you’re now in the DEI space – can you tell us more about your educational and professional background?

A: My educational background is in science; more specifically, I am a cell biologist and geneticist. I studied cell division and its role in the onset of cancer. However, I left the bench and transitioned to the DEI field almost a decade ago. My roles in the DEI space have focused on connecting DEI efforts across entities and implementing JEDI principles across an organization to foster true culture change. Some of my current work at Stanford includes co-founding the Certificate of Critical Consciousness and Anti-Oppressive Praxis for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars and serving on the Staff IDEAL Engage working group. Outside of work, I have taken my knowledge of the sciences and my hobby of dancing to start an organization called STEM Dance-ology that aims to make science accessible to learners of all ages.

Q: What are the biggest JEDI opportunities you see for staff in the School of Medicine?
A: We have a lot of room to grow, and I’m excited about evaluating what exists and figuring out ways to embed principles of justice and equity. In addition, I’m looking forward to meeting and forming relationships with staff that are willing to share the challenges they face, supporting JEDI work in their local environments, and understanding how I can partner with them to combine and advance our efforts. I believe in the power of collective action, and I am eager to build these collectives with staff across the School.

Q: The death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement of 2020 highlighted many of the long-standing racial and social justice issues that are deeply engrained in our society. What are your thoughts or plans on how to continue the efforts of the BLM movement internally here at the School?

A: 2020 was a year... and so is 2021. I am hopeful that the response over last summer will continue its momentum for racial justice in SoM. We must continue these conversations, look inward at our own practices both individually and as an institution, and build our capacity to create change in a meaningful and intentional manner. This requires everyone to be a part of the change. I hope to provide guidance through education and training so that staff feel empowered to hold these conversations. I will be using parts of the Certificate program, learning from other DEI professionals across Stanford on how they are implementing DEI curriculum, and using external networks and resources to thoughtfully and intentionally build this.

Q: What’s one piece of advice you would give to our SoM community about how to bring JEDI issues to light within their own teams?

A: We have to be vulnerable, compassionate and empathetic and understand that these conversations about justice and equity are happening - and need to happen - in our workplace. I encourage each individual to feel empowered to model JEDI values, highlight important JEDI issues they witness, learn of, or experience in the workplace and be open to pushing the bounds of comfort around these topics. If we can extend love to each other, we can truly begin to change the way each of us feels in our day-to-day work. One quote that is often cited that speaks to me is by Maya Angelou: “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” If we can show each other care and respect, then we continue to build and spread that value across our culture.

JEDI Resources for School of Medicine Staff

- Stanford Medicine Diversity website
- Diversity Programs for Stanford Medicine Staff

Any and all staff who would like to discuss justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion issues in the workplace, please feel free to reach out directly to Shaila at skotadia@stanford.edu.