



Perspective/Opinion

How To Support Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Patients

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I felt a complex wave of emotions as I prepared to enter the room of my next patient. I was excited yet nervous for the opportunity to finally take care of an Asian patient.

"Hi, I'm James Wu, a Chinese American fourth-year medical student working with Dr. B to help take care of you today," I said.

I could see the slightly surprised expression at my intentional inclusion of "Chinese American," which quickly turned into a smile as she responded with, *"Thanks for sharing, I'm actually Hmong American."*

*"Thank **you** for sharing," I replied with a smile. I felt that instant connection and a mutual understanding. After I felt like I'd developed some rapport and trust, I decided to address the elephant in the room while wrapping up our conversation. "Before I leave to let my attending know what we discussed, I also wanted to acknowledge the trauma and violence our Asian community has been dealing with and that I'm here for you if you want to talk about anything."*

There was a flash of emotion across her face. "To be honest, it's been scary. I'm definitely more anxious when I'm outside. I was scared even coming to the clinic today, but I'm even more frightened for my elderly parents."

As I listened to her fears, I couldn't help but think about my wife, my mother, and my grandmothers.

I held it together for the rest of our conversation, thanked her for her time and confiding in me, and left the room. In our society, where Asian Americans have been experiencing racism and white America doesn't see this as a problem, I felt a little better helping my Asian patient feel safe, heard, and seen.

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It's critical for clinicians to know that 6,603 hate incidents have been reported to the Stop AAPI Hate reporting center from March 19, 2020 to March 31, 2021. Anti-Asian hate crimes increased nearly 150 percent in 2020, and since the beginning of 2021, anti-Asian attacks have continued to increase.

So what can you do to help? Here are 3 ways to best support Asian Americans and Pacific Islander (AAPI) patients:

1. Acknowledge that anti-Asian racism exists and that it may be a difficult time for AAPI people right now. Show that you care.

2. Provide a safe space if patients want to discuss racial trauma

Allow patients to direct this conversation and be respectful of boundaries. Be there to listen and to provide resources.

3. Actively participate in anti-racist work. Educate yourself.

Instead of asking your marginalized colleagues to teach you, work to raise awareness among your non-AAPI colleagues, learn about and practice bystander intervention, reform the institutional policies that perpetuate structural racism, and advocate for your AAPI colleagues and patients.

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