



## Guest Director's Corner

### Black History Month

By Valerie Flanary, MD, FACS

Happy Black History Month! February is the month that we, as a nation, recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of Black people in America. This month, I chose to focus my attention on the House of Medicine. While Blacks are 13% of the population, we are only 6% of practicing physicians. As one of the 6%, how did I get here? My parents, members of the Great Northern Migration, would often say that you must have an education to be Black *and* successful. While I do believe that there is some truth in that statement, I believe that having a strong community is perhaps even more important. Having people around you who listen to, advocate for, and challenge you can positively impact your career. It is even more meaningful if at least some of those people look like you.

As a medical student at the University of Illinois, I studied in the Minority Opportunity Program (MOP) room, a room filled with Black medical students studying, laughing, and crying together and working towards success as a community. Though the majority of my professors and faculty were not people of color, my community gave me the strength, resolve and confidence to become a doctor. As a resident, I came to MCW. There were no study rooms and there were very few physicians that looked like me. Two Black faculty members, Drs. Al Walker and Lauree Thomas, sought me out and offered me the comfort of community. My community was small, but it still made me feel less out of place.

I have now been a part of the faculty at MCW for more than twenty-five years. Since my residency, the numbers of faculty of color and people of color in leadership positions have steadily increased. This year, MCW has matriculated its largest class of Black students in its history. The institution has curated a large group of mentors, allies and sponsors who are committed to ensuring the success of all its people. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Groups are present at all levels of the institution.

Fortunately, MCW has several groups within its organization that offer community to our Black students, residents, faculty, and staff. At the student level, the MCW Chapter of the Student National Medical Society (SNMA), the organization for medical students of color, provides programming throughout the year to support students of color. White Coats for Black Men has recently established a chapter at MCW, addressing the critical shortage of black men in medicine.

At the enterprise level, we are very fortunate to have the more recent addition of the Black Leaders Internal Advisory Team (BLIAT). This group brings together senior Black leaders of MCW and its clinical partner institutions to advise, champion, and ensure accountability of MCW's anti-Racism, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion strategy to achieve a positive impact on the well-being and health of the Milwaukee Region's Black population. The BLIAT provides a strong leadership voice behind identified critical actions that advance racial equity and a reimaging of MCW as an institution positioned to thrive in this new decade and beyond.

Though Black History Month only lasts for twenty-eight days, I encourage you take advantage of the experience, wisdom, and community that these affinity groups offer 365 days a year.

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