NNOHA Response to Racism - 2020

Last week, NNOHA was stunned by the callous killing of George Floyd by four Minneapolis police officers, and the subsequent brutal treatment of peaceful protestors across the country. We had no words to express our outrage and grief, so we printed words Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, while in police custody, fifty-seven years ago. As we have listened to NNOHA leaders and members, and other colleagues, we are now ready to offer this response, framed by the words of Dr. King. . .

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

NNOHA remains committed to the vision it has had since its founding: access to oral health for everyone, including the most marginalized, underrepresented, and vulnerable in society. We understand that this vision is impossible in a world where systemic racism is allowed to exist. We pledge ourselves to continue to listen and learn, to pursue a deeper understanding of how systemic racism creates barriers to housing, education, employment, savings, outcomes of policing and outcomes of health. We pledge to share our growing understanding with our members.

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. . .

NNOHA remains committed to being a “network,” reliant upon the diverse, inclusive, strong and growing membership of oral health champions of all races, regions, and backgrounds. We commit to partnering with other like-minded champions in the struggle against racism. We mourn with our black members and friends, recognizing their exhaustion and anger from the singular trauma of the past days, and the cumulative injustice of the past 400 years.

. . . tied in a single garment of destiny.

NNOHA affirms that black lives absolutely matter. We are diminished when a life is lost. We are devastated when the life is taken by someone we should trust. We apologize for times we saw injustice and did not recognize it, or did recognize it, and said nothing.

Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” *

NNOHA remembers lives devalued, lives cut short. What affected them affects us. We name the names of Freddie Gray, LaQuon McDonald (17), Oscar Grant III, Philando Castile, Atatiana Jefferson, Aiyana Jones (7), Sandra Bland, Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin (17), Tamir Rice (12), Botham Jean, Elijah McClain, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and many, many more. How many coffins must we walk behind on the journey to justice? We believe a door of possibility has been opened in this moment. Let us walk forward through it together.

NNOHA Board of Directors, NNOHA Membership Resources and Advocacy Committee, NNOHA Staff
June 8, 2020

*Letter From the Birmingham Jail. April 16, 1963