

SNMA Statement on the Recent Killings of Unarmed Black Americans

We are tired.

It has taken us time to put words to paper because *we are tired* of the unjust killings of unarmed Black American citizens at the hands of those sworn to protect and serve. *We are tired* of precious Black lives being reduced to seasonal hashtags. *We are tired* of seeing dead Black bodies splayed across media platforms for sensational consumption. *We are tired* of corrupt police officers taking innocent Black lives, time and time again, while enabled by the American court system to evade justice. *We are tired* of hearing all lives matter when institutions of this nation have yet to affirm that Black Lives Matter. As Black Americans, first and foremost, these episodes of violence and injustice have exhausted us physically, mentally, and emotionally. However, as we sit at the privileged intersection of being Black Americans and emerging physician leaders, we cannot let this instance pass without our voice being heard.

The Student National Medical Association (SNMA) was founded in 1964 due to the exclusion and unfair treatment of Black physicians and medical students in American medical professional spaces. We have been fighting this fight against racial injustice since the inception of this organization. We must be clear, however, that this is not our fight alone. **If you *can breathe*, this is your fight, too.**

As members of the medical community, we all have a role in addressing this public health crisis. In this statement, we will address the needed roles and duties of our community, including our medical education leadership and our peer colleagues.

To our medical education leadership and administration:

We appreciate your statements addressing recent events. As students of this institution with lived experiences that run deeper than recent events, we appreciate your acknowledgment of perpetual injustices and inequalities brought against Black lives. We urge you to prioritize the requests of your students as you discuss changes to resolve these injustices within the University of California, Davis School of Medicine community. Having one of the most diverse classes in medical education across the nation is a significant accomplishment. However, we must recognize that having more diversity comes with the obligation to foster an environment that properly supports and protects the population of students this institution hopes to educate.

The hiring of the Dean of the Office of Student and Resident Diversity (OSRD) is long overdue. Black students need a designated person to turn to when injustices take place within the classroom and beyond. We look forward to the OSRD dean not only listening to our grievances, but also amplifying them and implementing policies that will provide continued support to aid in our success. At a time when police are unjustly weaponized against Black medical students on campus and the larger issues of systemic racism inciting uprisings around the country, now is a critical time for the Dean of OSRD position to be filled. Additionally, within medical education

leadership, there is not one single Black or African American Faculty member. Representation is an important part of change. We truly need an advocate who has a voice, positionality, authority, and a shared identity to speak for us.

We need long-term investments in wellness interventions.

Our mental health has a direct impact on our ability to thrive as medical students. An understanding of historical racial traumas and how they affect our academic performance and community engagement is imperative. Now is the time to rely on the expertise of Black therapists equipped to help black students process traumatic experiences and heal from them. We request this individual as a permanent addition to our wellness team.

Revise and reform the curriculum.

Racism is a public health issue, and as physicians-in-training, our curriculum should effectively prepare all medical students to address it. Our curriculum should have the aim to understand the systemic racism that produces health disparities. We request that our new curriculum fully integrate antiracism discourse. We ask to adopt the framework including – but not limited to – the UC Davis Race and Health Summer Institute, led by Dr. Jann Murray-García, and discourse recommendations from the SNMA. We also ask that our educators increase the representation of Black people and people of color in clinical cases and standardized patients to supplement this new curriculum.

Training in diversity and inclusion should be expanded and longitudinal.

We recognize the efforts of implemented training through the Supporting Educational Excellence in Diversity (SEED) module. Let us remember the need for inclusion as well. This learning opportunity should be extended to all staff in roles that intersect with student education, including auxiliary staff. Furthermore, uprooting the stems of racism, including bias and microaggressions in education, is an ongoing pursuit. We request that training be thorough and implemented within each block (i.e., biannually) to reach the depths of this issue. Moreover, the UC Davis Health should institute annual antiracism training for all employees. Similar to requirements such as HIPPA, Safety and Security, and Sexual Harassment that focus on prevention, this should be a priority as well.

Black preclinical IORs are necessary.

We are well aware of the profound impact physicians of color have on the patients that look like them. This ideology must be adopted in our educational system as well. Moreover, this is a necessity for the students of color who want to become faculty and medical education leaders in the future. We know too well the difficulty of trying to be what you can not see.

We must create strong pipeline programs and continue to diversify the medical field.

The class of 2023 is the most diverse class UCDSOM has seen. It must not stop there. Black men comprise one of the smallest percentages of practicing physicians in the nation, and the applicants of Black men to medical school have been trending downward. We need to increase the presence of black men on this campus and in the field. Doing so would require

understanding the roadblocks of Black male success in early education and creating robust interventions to overcome them.

Place funding where it counts.

Financial support is a necessity behind the action we are requesting. We request funding allocations to go toward new curriculum development and new pipeline programming initiated by the SNMA. In addition, we ask that funding be reserved for student interest groups to collaborate with the National Action Network, NAACP, and Black Lives Matter Sacramento chapters to bring reform to our campus.

To fellow students, residents, faculty, and staff of the UCDSOM community:

First, do no harm. Racism is a social determinant of health and as medical professionals, we appreciate the acknowledgment of your responsibility to serve. We appreciate those of you joining protests, signing petitions, and providing your financial support to national organizations for racial justice. Nevertheless, there is still much work to be done. It is the responsibility of all of our community members to kneel against injustice. Brutality against Black people has a long history, so we call for our allies, not only during times of catastrophes, but also until there is the complete eradication of injustice. The following are our recommendations for allyship:

Examine your privilege and your perspective.

Seeing and hearing about racism and not having to experience it personally is a privilege. To be a true ally will require perspective and changes in thoughts. Non-Black people do not have authority to control or comment on how oppressed people demonstrate the frustrations of their oppressors. We need to discourage the media's attempts at changing the narrative and refocus on the pressing issues at hand.

Stay on topic.

Non-Black people expressing their own feelings of guilt, or worse, trying to empathize with Black injustices by comparing their hardships to ours, shifts the narrative away from Black people. While Black people are processing and grieving, non-black people must refrain from taking up space with their personal experiences.

Educate yourself.

The responsibility to educate about racism and injustice should not be placed upon people who identify with the Black/African Diaspora, so education on this topic requires your own initiative. Below we have provided a list of books recommended by the National SNMA.

White Rage - Carol Anderson

White Fragility - Robin Diangelo

Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together in The Cafeteria - Beverly Daniel Tatum

Understanding Race, Ethnicity, Power - Elaine Pinderhughes

The New Jim Crow - Michelle Alexander

Medical Apartheid - Harriet A. Washington

Reproducing Race - Khiara Bridges
The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks - Rebecca Skloot
When and Where I Enter - Paula J Giddings
Between The World and Me - Ta-Nehisi Coates
Tears We Cannot Stop - Michael Eric Dyson
Crucial Conversations - Kerry Patterson
Fatal Invention - Dorothy E. Roberts

Speak out against microaggressions and covert racism.

Every time. Without exception. If you want to be an agent for change, now more than ever, you must have uncomfortable conversations with families, friends, and colleagues to address comments and perspectives that support the oppression of Black people.

Remain informed and vote.

Structural racism has been maintained for years through our legislation. Voting is a chance to dismantle this system that has kept us oppressed for so long. Do your research well before heading to the polls, unpack the propositions proposed, and *always* have the well-being of the Black community and other marginalized groups in mind as you cast your ballot.

We understand that change does not happen overnight. However, we must not delay. This letter serves as an immediate call to action by everyone within the UCDSOM community. We need our leaders to commit to fulfilling the requests mentioned above. We need our allies to consider and act on these recommendations. We need to know, without a doubt, that all of UCDSOM is devoted to change, long after the current headlines and statements fade into the background. We *all* need to be able to not only breathe, but thrive.

Signed,

Student National Medical Association
UC Davis Chapter