AMA assembles task force to guide truth, reconciliation, healing

JUN 9, 2023

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Following up on policy adopted by the House of Delegates at the June 2021 AMA Special Meeting, the AMA Board of Trustees has appointed a Truth, Reconciliation, Healing and Transformation Task Force. It will serve in an advisory capacity to the board over the next two years.

The task force will guide organizational transformation within and beyond the AMA toward restorative justice to promote truth, reconciliation, and healing in medicine and medical education. It will provide guidance on the identification and amelioration of past harms caused by the AMA, such as discriminatory practices resulting from the Flexner Report, a landmark 1910 criticism of medical education in the U.S., funded by the AMA and published by the Carnegie Foundation.

The report has been criticized for advocating policy changes that encouraged systemic racism, including the closure of five of the country’s seven Black medical schools.

The task force will inform and advise the AMA on ways to establish restorative justice dialogues between AMA leaders, physicians from historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups and their physician associations, and other critical stakeholders.

“The AMA has made great strides in recent decades to acknowledge, reckon with, and rectify its past policies and this new task force will help inform future steps by the organization,” said AMA Executive Vice President and CEO James L. Madara, MD., who highlighted the task force at the opening of the 2023 AMA Annual Meeting.

Dialogue is key

The task force, which started meeting in May, has two co-chairs. One is Niva Lubin-Johnson, MD, MPH, an internist who is past president of the National Medical Association and previously served as chair of the AMA Women Physicians Section and the Minority Affairs Section and serves as a
delegate to the AMA House of Delegates from Illinois.

The other co-chair is Matthew Wynia, MD, MPH, professor of medicine and public health at the University of Colorado School of Medicine in Aurora and the director of the University of Colorado’s Center for Bioethics and Humanities. Prior to holding that role, Dr. Wynia directed the AMA Institute for Ethics. During his time at the AMA, he helped conduct research on the history of Black American doctors and organized medicine.

Other participants include AMA Board of Trustees liaisons, members of the AMA House of Delegates, physicians from historically marginalized communities, and external subject-matter experts from key fields such as medical history and education, policy, ethics, philanthropy and economics. The task force has no AMA-delegated authority.

A commitment to improve

For more than three decades, the AMA has worked to address the organization’s past discriminatory and harmful practices and its role in helping to create inequities in health care and medicine. This includes the AMA’s 2008 apology for more than a century of policies that excluded African-Americans from the AMA.

In 2019, the association launched the AMA Center for Health Equity, which works to embed health equity across the AMA so that health equity is part of the practice, process, action, innovation, organizational performance and outcomes.

Health inequities in the U.S. have been widely researched and documented. A recent study published in JAMA found that the U.S. “Black population had 1.63 million excess deaths, representing more than 80 million years of potential life lost” between 1990 and 2020.