

ANS/AOS Action Statement Against Systemic Racism

Dear Otology and Neurotology Community,

The leadership of the American Neurotology Society and the American Otological Society feel compelled to formally respond to recent events in the United States that have once again brought to light systemic racism and long-standing inequities. We grieve for George Floyd and for countless others who have been devalued, dismissed, and killed due to the color of their skin. We share the outpouring of anger, pain, and frustration expressed around the world about the senseless loss of life of unarmed black men and women at the hands of police officers. We denounce prejudice, racially motivated violence, and the legislation, policies, and culture that promote and perpetuate racism in all forms. We support the peaceful demonstrations demanding change.

Our calling as physicians is to improve the condition of humanity. We are entrusted with a particular responsibility to detect, relieve and prevent human suffering. Nothing more directly or persistently undermines our collective health and causes more suffering than structural racism, violence, and injustice. Therefore, we are compelled to act. To meet this challenge requires introspection, both as individuals and as a society. Are we listening? Are we complicit through silence or inaction? Have we done enough to recognize and eradicate our own implicit bias? Have we been honest with ourselves about institutionalized racism in our communities, hospitals, and specialty? Have we done enough to counteract the racial disparities affecting healthcare in our own practices? Are we doing all we can to be a force for positive change?

We comprise only a small segment of the medical community. However, we focus on communication: one of the defining characteristics of humanity. We are also educators -- whether for our patients, students, peers, or greater community. As surgeons, we are motivated by decisive action and meeting challenges directly. Let us harness our collective strengths to effect positive change. It is through a combination of communication, education, and decisive action that we can combat the plague of racism. The leadership of the American Neurotology

Society and the American Otological Society hereby strengthens our resolve to foster diversity and inclusion, address racial disparity, and increase cultural sensitivity and competency in our Societies. We have taken steps in the right direction, yet acknowledge that we have a long way to go. In particular, the underrepresentation of African Americans in our ranks weakens our voice. We should lead by example - and set the standard for others to follow. Definitive action can have positive impact well beyond our traditional scope of practice today and into the future.

We propose a series of actions to be implemented through the combined efforts of our societies. These will be formally enumerated in a Diversity and Inclusion strategic plan to guide our efforts and measure our progress. We acknowledge that we may require external consultants to audit and advise us to optimize our efforts. The initial categories of action we envision include:

Engage our membership. We will rely on the strength of our members to enact these initiatives. We have begun a process through which members can identify their particular interests, expertise, and motivations, and can connect with others with complementary characteristics. The resulting network of individuals will be the core for enacting our goals.

Increase our visibility. Many members of underrepresented minorities in medicine do not have sufficient exposure to our specialty during their medical school experience. Many schools with significant underrepresented minority populations may lack exposure to otolaryngology, much less neurotology. We propose to identify such medical colleges, and offer education and mentoring services to engage students who may have otherwise never even considered our specialty as a career option. With the recent wide-spread access to tele-education resources, such efforts should be readily implemented and yield significant rewards.

Empower future leaders. We will offer educational and travel grants to underrepresented minorities in medicine who wish to learn more about otology-neurotology. By providing a broad early exposure of underrepresented populations to our multifaceted and rewarding specialty, we

will ensure that our specialty attracts the most capable and motivated individuals and will benefit from a more diverse and inclusive community.

Address healthcare disparities. Significant disparities in healthcare access and outcomes exist based on race. One clear example among many in otology is timely access to cochlear implantation, which can have a profound impact on the individual, family, and community. We will promote research, discussions, and policies that seek to identify root causes and implement effective strategies to overcome disparities in access and outcomes in healthcare. We will not be able to effectively combat racial disparities until we better understand the magnitude of the problem and areas most in need of attention. The formal review of applications and selection processes can be effectively integrated into our existing society mechanisms.

Support our communities. Our societies' membership represents tremendous potential to mentor underserved minority communities. We can serve existing programs to engage high school students in need and instill the enthusiasm we share for hearing preservation, balance disorders, microsurgery, neuroscience, and bioengineering. We can offer our expertise to community speaker programs and contribute our insights into how to collaborate to lessen suffering of those in need. We will also engage in partnerships with our sister societies in otolaryngology, academic medicine, and other specialties. Our effect will be magnified by combining our efforts with those of other members of the medical community.

We are open to hearing additional ideas, insights, and options. We look forward to working together to achieve our collective goals.