



Linda T. Farr, RDN, CSOWM, LD, FAND
president@eatright.org



Listen and Change

In the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd and other Black Americans, the world has risen up in pain and anguish to condemn social injustice and racism that has systematically impacted the lives of people of color. Many of you have shared your outrage and impatience regarding lack of diversity in our profession, structural racism in our American culture that leads to inequities, and the need for a lasting systemic change. You have asked for implicit bias training, cultural humility, and frank conversations. You have asked us to look internally as individual members and as an organization. And you have asked us to listen.

When so many of our members are hurting, we all feel the pain. I have asked some of our Black members to share what they would most like their fellow members to know at this time.

My particular thanks to the National Organization of Blacks in Dietetics and Nutrition (NOBIDAN) for their ongoing advocacy, ideas, and exhortation to the Academy and to take the steps needed to create a more just and equitable organization and profession. NOBIDAN members and I have had many enlightening meetings and conversations in recent weeks and months, and they will of course continue.

As a white woman, I cannot tell you that I understand the unique life experiences, fears, anger, inequities, lack of respect, and feelings that our members of color are facing at this historic and turbulent time. I can tell you that I will take action to:

- Restore confidence in our organization by working with our Board of Directors, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, dietetic practice groups, member interest groups, Affiliates, the Accreditation Council for

Denine Rogers, MS, RDN, LD, FAND, chair, National Organization of Blacks in Dietetics and Nutrition (NOBIDAN)

It is important for fellow Academy members to know that right now is the time for change to come with diversity and inclusion. From 1998 to 2016, the percentage of African American dietetics students declined by 11.6%. All other racial/ethnic groups have increased, ranging from 33.4% (Asian and Pacific Islander) to 133.2% (Hispanic). Currently, there is a decline of African American dietitians to less than 3% due to the closing of nutrition and dietetics programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and declines in funding for HBCUs since the 1970s.

A survey conducted by Princeton Survey Research Association showed approximately one in five African Americans state a preference for a same-race health care provider due to personal experiences of discrimination in their health care. In the 2010 census, the total population of Blacks was 13% but there are less than 3% of African American dietitians. This is truly unacceptable due to the high rates of nutritional-related diseases such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and coronary artery disease, to name a few, that are very prevalent in African Americans.

We can bring everyone together during these changing times by having cultural humility training. What is cultural humility? Cultural humility is the ability to notice each other's viewpoints, appreciate each other's backgrounds, and ultimately work together. The best way to practice cultural humility training is to maintain willingness to reject what you know or what you think you know about a person based on pre-judgments about their culture. Recently, NOBIDAN members had the chance to tell their stories of dealing with systemic racism and microaggressions as a student or as a registered dietitian. Doing this gave everyone who represented diverse backgrounds a chance to learn more about the experiences and cultural character of others and hopefully will increase the quality of their interactions with diverse clients and community members.

Education in Nutrition and Dietetics, and the Commission on Dietetic Registration to create organization-wide structures and accountability to address Inclusivity, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) that will permeate throughout the Academy and create real, sustained change.

- Empower our Diversity and Inclusion Committee and our Member Interest Groups (MIGs) to find solutions to diversify the profession, foster diverse leadership, and bring cultural competency to members in order to better serve the world.
- Mobilize you to speak out about our vision of a world where all people thrive through the transformative power of food and nutrition.

The Academy must take actionable steps to educate our members, increase diversity within the profession, and ensure that all members feel heard and included.—Terry Brown

The heavy curtain of centuries of discrimination and abuse has been lifted for all to see. Behind this curtain lie systemwide and worldwide flaws, inequities, and discrimination that go beyond Black, Indigenous, and people of color to all those who have been marginalized because of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, abilities, and more. This article is the first of a two-part series on diversity, equity, and inclusion; next month's article will look at the many ways the Academy has taken action—and will increase our efforts—to promote diversity and inclusion.

Demetrius J. Willis, MBA, MS, RD, LD, CPT, senior dietitian and nutrition coordinator, Lake County, IL, WIC program

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated existing health disparities. If you have not before, now is an opportunity to explore the question “Why?” Why do these disparities exist? Why do they persist? Don't be afraid to have awkward conversations, watch uncomfortable interviews/news stories, and understand that privileges you may have put you in a position to institute change in your community for others. Just like COVID-19, health disparities impact all of us and we all have a role in our nation's safety and wellness.

Kristen F. Gradney, MHA, RDN, LDN, senior director of operations, Our Lady of the Lake Children's Health, Baton Rouge, LA

I think it is important to know that the Academy recognizes that lack of diversity and that there is work to be done to not only improve diversity and acceptance of minority members, but to improve access and care for minority populations. Sharing that the Academy is looking to African American dietetics leaders during this time to guide the conversation and shape the efforts is imperative to improving the trust and view of the Academy right now. As an African American registered dietitian and health care professional, I am compelled to continue to work closely with the Academy to bring a diverse perspective and increase acceptance amongst our peers. I am proud to be able to drive change through supporting legislation, being a face of the Academy in the media, and being a voice at the table of change. If not now, when? And if not us, then who? I hope that we can truly engage our members and start the wheels of change in motion.

Michele D. Lites, RD, CSO, FAND, radiation oncology specialist, Kaiser Permanente; past chair, NOBIDAN; past member, Academy's Board of Directors

Our country sits at an historic crossroads on race relations with many companies, organizations, and governments moving swiftly to improve ethnic underrepresentation and remedy past discrimination. Black RDs in the United States have dropped to just 2.6%; will the Academy step forward with a proactive plan to improve diversity or passively sit idle in this crucial moment? The obstacles of diminished internship opportunities are real, and the recent imposition of a more costly master's degree education requirement should have enough data to be examined for its contribution to a less diverse profession. We must move forward and act with an introspective, transparent, and honest commitment to achieve meaningful change.

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How can the Academy make the biggest impact to create permanent change in our organization and our communities? How can we use our expertise to change inequities in food and nutrition and access to health care?

I will lead by example and ask you to join me in the following:

- Look at yourself and evaluate your own biases. Take a fresh look at how you view others and the world.
- Speak out and help us create solutions that will make our organization better and our patients and clients healthier.
- Give your time and talent to help us make permanent change.

We have a lot of work to do. We must ask all members to listen to each other, to ask questions, to consider diverse viewpoints and to hold inclusive discussions that will empower us as a profession and organization to find solutions.

**Terry Brown, MBA, MPH, RD, LD, CNSC, director,
Medical City Healthcare Dietetic Internship Program**

The Black Lives Matter movement should be a call to action for all, including the profession of nutrition and dietetics. This unprecedented movement has highlighted some noteworthy disparities that impact Blacks and African Americans: significant chronic disease burden coupled with high mortality rates, lack of access to high-quality health care, police brutality/criminal justice system inequalities, and discrepancies in pay for comparable work. I believe that we can begin to address some of these issues and start the healing process by showing empathy and attempting to understand the experiences and perspectives of people of color through open dialogue. As an organization, the Academy must take actionable steps to educate our members, increase diversity within the profession, and ensure that all members feel heard and included even if they are a small percentage of the constituency (eg, NOBIDAN).

Visit *Food & Nutrition Magazine's Stone Soup blog* for more stories of the experiences of Black members of the Academy.

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