



Diversity: The Changing Face of Anesthesiology

Creating a Diversity and Inclusion Task Force for the SEA: Our Journey on a Road to New Horizons

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The vision of the Society for Education in Anesthesia (SEA) is “*Excellence in patient care through education;*” our mission statement is to “*Support, Enrich and Advance anesthesia education and those who teach*” and our core values are *Collaboration, Innovation, Scholarship and an Inclusive community*. It was this last core value that served as the guiding principle when the co-chairs of the SEA Spring 2019 meeting, Dr. Libby Ellinas and Dr. Herodotos Ellinas, created a powerful and inspiring academic offering titled “*Integration and Diversity: Creating Diverse Teams, Building Exceptional Leaders.*”

This meeting was about **Diversity in Education**. We heard about the importance of perspectives and were challenged to consider what diversity could or should look like in the field of anesthesiology. This meeting was about **Diversity in our Work Environment**. We were presented with the concept of diversity as an iceberg that encompasses many dimensions, a few visible (race or gender) but mostly hidden under the surface (sexual orientation or religious beliefs). We learned about the power of inclusive diversity and increased competence to inspire better decision-making resulting in improved care for underrepresented and marginalized communities. We confronted the barriers to diversification in anesthesiology and the impact of societal inequity to patients, staff, and learners. This meeting was about **Women’s Equality and Equity**. We considered the insights and experiences of three women anesthesiology chairs, who outlined the barriers and the successes that women in anesthesiology have experienced in attaining equality but not necessarily equity. Women anesthesiologists were called on to stand up for themselves and contest unintentional biases that hinder advancement of women in anesthesiology. This meeting was about **Awareness**. We were reminded about the terminology for describing sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression and learned about the shared key health problems common to the LGBTQ population. We were educated in how difficulties in accessing care can lead to poor outcomes. This meeting was more than a high-quality



academic experience. It identified a gap between the values our organization embraces and the steps and actions we should be taking to operationalize all the aspects of diversity and inclusion within our community and organization.

This meeting was a call to action! And to take up this call to action, the SEA Board of Directors decided to create a Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion. The SEA, like most academic societies, has a standard way of choosing task force chairs, and that is for the president or the board to appoint someone. However, to identify the chair, co-chair, and members of this new task force, our board of directors chose a different path that embraced some of the learnings from our Spring 2019 meeting. To make sure that we included our whole membership in the creation of this new task force, the SEA Board developed a request for application (RFA) process. The full SEA membership

for what this would look like for the SEA. The response to our RFA process was exceptional and made the process of selecting the chair and committee members a difficult one for the board; so many well-qualified individuals applied! In the end, the SEA Board was able to select a chair and a co-chair who had exceptional experience with diversity and inclusion work, longstanding commitments to the SEA, and outstanding leadership experience. Together the new chair and co-chair identified eight members to serve on the task force. This group began their work in June 2020 and will advise the SEA Board and organization as a whole on processes and actions that make sure our society embraces the principles of diversity and inclusivity at all levels and in all our work and operations.

Tracey Straker, MD, of Montefiore Medical Center, was selected as chair of our new task force, supported by Herodotos

Charlene Blake	University of California San Francisco
Odie Ehie	University of California San Francisco
Michal Gajewski	Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Josephine Hernandez	Tufts Medical Center
Jenny Lau	Children’s Hospital of Los Angeles
Tomás Lazo	Oregon Health & Science
Bryan Mahoney	Icahn School of Medicine of Mount Sinai
Isabel Pesola	Montefiore Medical Center

was invited to submit applications to serve on the new task force as either chair or as task force member (or both). We asked applicants to describe their experience with diversity and inclusion work and their vision

Ellinas, MD, of Medical College of Wisconsin, as co-chair. Task force members include:

Dr. Straker’s leadership vision for the SEA Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion calls on us as educators to understand that



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learners accept and comprehend knowledge based on their past experiences, interactions, and the observations in society. These concepts resonate throughout our academic institutions, our hospitals, and ultimately impact specific patient populations. Therefore, diversity in our institutions, inclusion in leadership and planning, and respect for all beings is critical to education in the anesthesiology community.

SEA is overflowing with educational talent that can be harnessed to fulfill its vision and values. By reaching out and partnering with other societies and anesthesiology organizations that have voiced intentional goals of diversification and inclusion, SEA can be a vehicle for education! We can work at all levels of academic training and rank, and with clinical and administrative leadership to be a force for change.

SEA champions diversity, inclusion, and respect, and we realize that to connect meaningfully with those we train, and ultimately with our patient population, we must be deliberate and intentional with the goals and the values we set forth and implement. These goals ultimately impact our patient population, their access to, and experience of, the health care they receive. We want that health care to be the finest and most equitable we can offer! ■