This decade began with a very difficult year. Heightened awareness of systemic racism and a global pandemic have presented 2 challenges that call into question our personal, professional, and societal responses and responsibilities. At the same time, these challenges affirm the underlying values that drive critical care providers and practice and direct our path forward for the future.

American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) President Elizabeth Bridges’ 2020-2021 theme encourages us that “This Is Our Moment” to be “All In.”

Critical care providers have intimate knowledge of the negative effects of health disparities on health, illness, and recovery. We see the effects of health disparities every day in our intensive care units (ICUs), and there is strong evidence that racial, social, and economic disparities make people more vulnerable to critical illness and trauma and negatively affect morbidity and mortality.1,2 Recent data point to poorer outcomes in coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) as well.3 Social determinants of health disproportionately affect black and brown people and pervade every environment, from local neighborhoods to nations.

Thus, if we are to improve health equity in critical care, we must advocate for equity not only in our own ICUs, but more broadly across the health care system and society at large.

We must advocate for our individual patients and their families, ensuring that we treat each person with dignity and respect. We must also accept a responsibility to work to make society more just for all. Commitment to social justice underpins all of the health professions. A core ethical principle of the World Health Organization is “to respect the dignity, worth, equality, diversity, and privacy of all persons.”4 Respect for persons is explicit in the American Nurses Association Code of Ethics for Nurses, which forms the ethical bedrock of the nursing profession. Three of the Code’s 9 provisions directly address diversity and inclusion.5 Provision 1 addresses the nurse’s responsibility to individuals (“The nurse practices with respect for the inherent dignity, worth, and unique attributes of every person”5(p1)), while provisions 8 and 9 speak to wider societal obligations (“The nurse collaborates with other health professionals and the public to protect human rights, promote health diplomacy, and reduce health disparities”5(p31) and “The profession of nursing, collectively through its professional organizations, must articulate nursing values, maintain the

©2020 American Association of Critical-Care Nurses
doi:https://doi.org/10.4037/ajcc2020139
Our patients and families need and deserve a health care system that provides high-quality care for all patients, addresses social determinants of health and health inequities head on, and seeks to eliminate health disparities.

...
FINANCIAL DISCLOSURES
None reported.

REFERENCES

To purchase electronic or print reprints, contact American Association of Critical-Care Nurses, 27071 Aliso Creek Road, Aliso Viejo, CA 92656. Phone, (800) 899-1712 or (949) 362-2050 (ext 532); fax, (949) 362-2049; email, reprints@aacn.org.