

Letter to the Editor

In Regard to: Why Racial Justice Matters in Radiation Oncology

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I applaud Chapman et al for initiating a difficult, thought-provoking conversation regarding structural racism in their work “Why racial justice matters in radiation oncology.”¹ As the authors correctly point out, systemic racism in the medical system begins far before anyone in our field sees a patient who has already been diagnosed with cancer. Given their championing of this issue, I encourage them to pursue this before a broader audience.

However, I also challenge them to consider whether their piece is too narrowly focused. The authors heavily criticized Dr DeWeese’s “Special message from the ASTRO chair.”² They state that Dr DeWeese’s ““all lives matter”” confession dilutes the message and fails to speak directly to anti-black violence.” This led to a response by Dr DeWeese³ and this journal’s editorial board⁴ exclusively addressing antiblack racism.

My concern is that painting this as purely black versus white creates a false dichotomy that overlooks the legitimate needs of nonblack and nonwhite patients and potentially gives nonblack and nonwhite practitioners an “out” to avoid introspective consideration of what part they can play in a solution to this long-standing, endemic problem. As a Latino, I initially felt that I should avoid this conversation. But as I write this, the Latinx community in my hometown in south Texas is getting



decimated by the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, underscoring the point that systemic racism in this country is not only a black versus white conversation.

The Acknowledge, Transparency, Intentionality, and Representation (ATIP) and Learn, Engage, Advocate, Defend, and Support (LEADS) principles set forth by Chapman et al are a great starting point toward a solution. But let’s not start the process by excluding other racial/ethnic groups that suffer from systemic racism. My stance is not an “all lives matter” approach, as that implies that I believe all people are equally at risk of suffering systemic racism’s consequences, which is not the case.

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Without hesitation, I stand with Drs. Chapman et al, the American Society for Radiation Oncology, and *Advances* to fight against antiblack racism. I firmly believe that “Tu lucha es mi lucha.” But with these recent *Advances* articles, I am now left to wonder who will stand with me to combat racism against the Latinx community and its disparate effect on health the next time Mexicans are targeted and murdered while shopping in a U.S. border town? Or the next time a Latino man dies at the hands of police while handcuffed and pleading for water? Will you be there with me?

References

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