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Diversifying Medical Journal Editorial Boards

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To the Editor: The first commentary piece we wrote was a call to eliminate race-based medicine in medical training materials. In it, we identified ourselves as women of color training in academic pediatrics. We were enthusiastic about the opportunity to submit an agent of change to a leading journal. The rejection letter provided appreciated constructive feedback from the reviewers and we readily accepted the decision. Unexpectedly, the editor additionally suggested we use a less “angry” tone and submit the commentary to a health-related social media platform instead.

The following month *JAMA* released a disastrous, tone-deaf podcast on structural racism. After public criticism the editor stepped down.¹ Leading scholars have recently described the paucity of published articles referencing racism and outlined a new standard for publishing on race inequities.²³ Unfortunately, editorial boards—both the gatekeepers and leading voices in medicine—tend to be a monolithic group lacking diversity.⁴ Our experience was not only timely, but it provided additional motivation to the underlying spirit of our original work: To reveal the roots of the problematic incorporation of systemic racial inequities in medicine. Here, we call for:

1. Long-term investment in the diversification of academic medical journal editorial boards;
2. Transparency of editorial board and reviewer demographics;
3. A system of anonymous peer review feedback in which authors can report racism and/or discrimination; and
4. Active incorporation of underrepresented trainees in the review process.
We hope these changes will lead to medical journals prioritizing publications that describe and provide solutions for health inequities and systematic racism, while also encouraging women of color to pursue careers in academia. We cannot underestimate the power of diversity and the pipeline of success it inherently creates.

This week I received my first reviewer invitation for a major academic journal. Here’s to change.

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