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Commentary: The Role of the MDA's Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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The Role of the MDA's Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

By the MDA Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The MDA aims to welcome and include all Michigan dentists. That's what is meant when the 2021-25 MDA Strategic Plan states "to better understand and improve diversity, equity, and inclusion at all levels."

Such a strategic plan fosters a goal of inclusion, not exclusion. That doesn't mean pushing current members aside to make room for new members. The MDA is simply proclaiming that not only is membership open to everyone, but that the MDA is actively working to ensure everyone feels welcome. However, to be truly inclusive, an "open door" policy is

never enough. Inclusion needs to be intentional, members must be invited in, and once invited, must feel welcomed and have the desire to stay.

We, the members of the MDA's Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, stand ready to assist the Board of Trustees by ensuring that the voice of diverse dentists is heard within the MDA and by recommending actions to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion within the MDA and its component societies.

All our assigned duties are in alignment with our MDA Strategic Plan. These include monitoring demo-

graphic trends in the profession, membership, and leadership, as well as identifying opportunities to enhance inclusion for dentists of diverse backgrounds. We've also been asked to recommend actions to enhance equity within the profession and evaluate and recommend ways to enhance member value for diverse dentists. We take our responsibilities very seriously and reject the idea that our committee's creation might be viewed as a fad, a concession to cultural "correctness," or serving a particular political agenda.

The way we see it, the more mem-

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bers the MDA includes, the more powerful the MDA becomes when negotiating what's best for Michigan's dentists and our profession. If the MDA does not include the perspectives of diverse dentists, it is missing a valuable opportunity to expand membership and the dental profession. In dentistry, we also know that a diverse and inclusive dental workforce is critical to increasing access to care and improving aspects of health care quality among all patient populations.

Diversity is not just about race. It's never been simply a black/white issue. True diversity speaks to race, sexual orientation, religion, age, gender identity, ethnicity, political affiliation, practice setting, and more. The MDA cannot truly speak for Michigan

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dentists, if the MDA does not represent all Michigan dentists.

To better address these issues, the MDA created the new Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Our committee's members are a diverse group that is working on creating an inclusive environment in the MDA. But our committee cannot do it alone. We need your help. We call on you to reject bias and prejudice and embrace optimism and hope. See your membership as an opportunity to connect with your neighbors and colleagues. Be the welcoming voice in your component. If there is a surplus of division around you, find common ground and move forward together.

The MDA is made for everyone, so let your voice be heard. Please feel free to reach out to any of us with your questions or desire to help. ●



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