

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee Newsletter

April 2023

Celebrating Black History and Women's History Months

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee welcomes you to reflect on Black History Month (February) and Women's History Month (March).

Our Mission

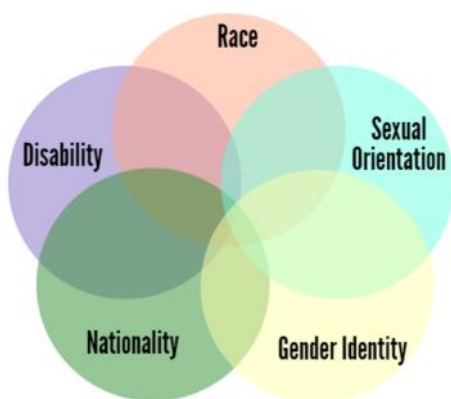
The Department of Surgery values diversity, equity, and inclusion among all faculty, staff, and trainees. The department is committed to fostering a collaborative and inclusive environment for all, regardless of any aspect of identity.

Individual differences and unique perspectives are critical to delivering high-quality care, engaging in scholarly activity, educating trainees, and supporting career advancement. We recognize the extent to which inequity, social injustice, and systemic racism impact the health of the Northwestern community and the communities we serve. Diverse ideas and innovative solutions are required to effectively tackle issues related to inequity, health disparities, systemic racism, and bias in medicine.

What is Intersectionality? Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in 1989 to describe how systems of oppression overlap to create distinct experiences for people with multiple identity categories.

Intersectionality, *n.*

The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise. (Oxford Dictionary)



Black History Month:

The celebration of Black History Month began in 1926, and was created by Carter G. Woodson, an African American scholar and publisher. The month of February was chosen to overlap with the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln.

Women's History Month:

The first "Women's History Day" was held in 1909 and commemorated the one-year anniversary of the Lower Manhattan garment workers' strikes. The day became a week in 1978, and in 1987, a full month.

We are grateful to two remarkable members of our community, Ms. Elizabeth (Eli) Asare-Danso and Dr. Whitney Jones, for their contributions and reflections.

Tell us about yourself:

My name is Eli Asare, and I am originally from Ottawa Canada, born and raised by Ghanaian parents. I've been at Northwestern Medicine for three years overseeing the medical group in the Division of Organ Transplantation. I completed my undergraduate studies at Francis Marion University in Florence, South Carolina, and graduate school in Cleveland Ohio, at Cleveland State University.

Why is earning trust so important for Black patients?

In a perfect world, we'd be able to say "we see no color, we are all the same" but we aren't. There are endless nuances and certain biases we carry, and often, they are completely implicit. Having a Black provider relieves some of that distress. You feel slightly more seen and heard. It is someone who may resonate with you just a bit more than someone else. For me, it makes a difference to have a black provider, or manager, or even co-worker. It is very empowering; I get a thrill seeing people who look like me doing great things. It's an unspoken feeling, and a small step that leads to breaking generational barriers.

What does Black History Month mean to you?

Black History Month is a month we come together and recognize that things are moving forward in terms of equity. It is a time when companies, institutions, and programs highlight that we are moving in the right direction. There's no question there is still a lot of work to be done, but people are starting to get comfortable talking about things that were previously taboo. Topics like the discrepancy in healthcare outcomes in minority populations. People are understanding words like biases and microaggressions – which enables them to stop, and reflect on their actions in real time. The more we talk about it, the more we are educating people. I truly believe it's part of my responsibility to continue to have these conversations. For me, Black History Month is a time to unpack those discrepancies and celebrate how far we've come. I love being a voice and educator where possible.

What are you reading?

I am reading "Harder Than I Thought". This is a fictional leadership book that follows the life day-to-day of a newly appointed CEO of a commercial cargo airplane company. The book illustrates the issues, opportunities and difficulties that face a CEO, or anyone in a leadership role. It's a great read, that very accurately depicts the struggles associated with the increasingly unpredictable world of business.

Tell us about your path to surgery and what has helped you to be successful?

My path to surgery has been unconventional and untraditional. It started when I enrolled at University of Missouri, premed at the age of 15. While training and traveling as a professional tennis player I achieved a world ranking in singles and doubles while not sacrificing my education. My path was lined with a wealth of support from a lot of sources. I have amazing parents who supported me both financially and emotionally. Howard University (my alma mater) has a long history of producing leaders in surgery. The environment fostered at Howard University enabled me to be successful in medical school, as an applicant, and it was a pivotal moment in my development as both a person and professional. Regarding successful habits - whether you call it a character flaw or not - when I get something in my head that I want to accomplish, I do not like the word "no". I firmly believe there is always a way to accomplish the goal with enough creativity and dedication. I am a firm believer in walking your own path, walking in your own truth, making the decisions that are best for you and not following the pathway others believe that you should be on. This determination is what keeps me and motivates me day to day.

What advice would you give a student interested in surgery?

I would encourage that person to explore surgery at all levels. It is hard to make an informed decision to move forward in any specialty fully aware. You must ask the hard questions and find people who will be honest about their experiences. Residency isn't easy, and everyone has their own struggles. Finding someone who will really talk to you about that, but at the same time, tell you what they enjoy about surgery and what drew them to surgery, is key.

What does Black History Month mean to you?

It is a time to reflect on our history and our culture of how we came to be and who we are. A time to reflect on our strength and resilience. To reflect on Black excellence and what that is, and to have conversations about what it means to be Black in America. It is a time when all cultures can learn and grow.



Elizabeth (Eli) Asare-Danso
Division Administrator,
Organ Transplantation

"There's no question there is still a lot of work to be done, but people are starting to get comfortable talking about things that were previously taboo"



Whitney Jones, MD, MBA
PGY-3, General Surgery

Who do you look up to?
Dr. Clive Calendar
(Founder, Howard University Transplant Center)

Dr. Bonnie Simpson-Mason
(First Medical Director for DEI, American College of Surgeons)

Dr. Lasalle D. Leffall
(First Black President of the American Cancer Society)