Neurosurgical Forum LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Black women in neurosurgery: a proposal for increased recruitment

TO THE EDITOR: We find several suggestions noted in the body of work by Bryant et al.¹ to be of critical importance to improving interest and recruitment of Black women in neurosurgery, and we aim to further discuss those factors here (Bryant JP, Nwokoye DI, Cox MF, Mbabuike NS. The progression of diversity: Black women in neurosurgery. *Neurosurg Focus*. 2021;50[3]:E9). These suggestions include, but are not limited to, modifications to the residency selection process, restructuring of the interview format, implementing alternative competency tests, and emphasizing recruitment of mentors with a particular focus on Black women.

The field of neurosurgery could facilitate recruitment of Black women into neurosurgery through a number of means, including offering preclinical opportunities for departmental shadowing across the various neurosurgical subspecialties; providing resident and attending-driven research with opportunities for first authorship; offering continued mentorship during manuscript and grant writing; facilitating clinical rotations and subinternships in neurosurgery; helping alleviate extraneous costs associated with the application cycle such as travel and lodging; incorporating preinterview connection with a neurosurgical resident and/or neurosurgical faculty member in the department; offering telecommunications methods to accommodate aspiring neurosurgical trainees with financial assistance; and more.²⁻⁶

In addition, we recommend that neurosurgery residency program directors may benefit from completing online diversity training modules or attaining competence by attending training at the AANS Annual Scientific Meeting. This meeting/training would update program directors on the need for diversity in neurosurgery residency as well as the importance of holistic applicant assessment. Furthermore, the AANS may benefit from facilitating opportunities for Black women to conduct research and find career and life mentors with the aim of representing our field across all aspects of patient care.

Finally, the AANS can continue to be mindful of the importance of social media outreach; even for students who do not have an in-person mentor, identification with social media influencers from similar backgrounds on platforms such as Instagram and Twitter can have far-

reaching impacts,⁷ potentially capturing the interest of a talented group considering neurosurgery as a specialty. If the AANS were to actively engage in this recruitment process, students from underrepresented backgrounds, but particularly Black women, will be empowered to pursue and succeed in a career in neurosurgery. In fact, the utility of social media has become even more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic and has demonstrated that online recruitment, although not a substitute for in-person interaction and mentorship, can be used to reach a wider breadth of medical students. Not only can social media help prepare residency applicants, but online platforms can also help promote key resources in front of a wide audience, including educational programs, opportunities for mentorship, and even career preparation training camps.⁸ Exactly how wide of an audience could be reached? Not surprisingly, a 2016 study revealed that 86% of 18- to 29-year-olds use at least one social media platform.⁹ If neurosurgical educational opportunities are broadcasted across Instagram, Twitter, and/or Facebook (these platforms are currently more popular among students than networking sites such as LinkedIn),¹⁰ a majority of medical students can likely be reached.

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Disclosures

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Response

I thank the authors for their letter in response to our article. We had the hope of elevating the discussion regarding the unique intersectionality of being a Black woman in the field of neurosurgery. I am encouraged that this letter in response reflects that this dialogue has been sparked. The suggestions indicated here to more aptly recruit young Black women into the field reflect intentional

engagement. This is a key strategy with a multiprong approach. Addressing the real and potential barriers to exposure to the field of neurosurgery acknowledges that these are not always appropriately addressed by a blanket push for diversity. There must be a consistent effort to make available opportunities for early mentorship, research endeavors, and early introduction to the field of neurosurgery. This effort is only effective if it addresses the financial, geographic, or interpersonal (bias) hurdles described in this letter. Additionally, involving organized neurosurgery, represented by the AANS in this letter, allows for efforts to recruit Black women to be an overarching goal for the discipline instead of a trending and limited ambition. Furthermore, we agree that utilizing the tools of modern engagement like social media to introduce the field of neurosurgery to a broader audience is exponential in its potential advantages. Notably, reaching those, especially young Black women, who would have not otherwise been engaged, can have far-reaching consequences in elevating the presence of Black women in the field.

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