

DIVERSITY IN OUR NEUROSURGICAL TRAINING PROGRAM

In the spring of 2018, the Society of Neurological Surgeons meeting featured a seminar on Diversity in Medical Education and Neurosurgery, moderated by the first female neurosurgeon to be elected president of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons, Shelly Timmons, M.D., Ph.D. This brought the spotlight upon issues surrounding diversity in the field.

An even better event for the attendees might have been to visit the Henry Ford Department of Neurosurgery. This past year saw the leadership of two female chiefs of the residency program, with a tremendously diverse group of trainees originating not only from the United States, but from all over the world. Original homes for some of the residents and/or their families include Zambia, Jamaica, Iraq, Lebanon, Greece, Korea, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, although many were born in the U.S., and others are American citizens following immigration. Religious affiliations include Christian (including Catholics from the Middle East and Asia), Muslims from the Middle East and Asia, and others with no religious affiliation.

In commenting upon the benefits of this, one resident remarked, “We don’t all celebrate the same holidays, so we don’t have issues covering call on Christmas, for example. Additionally, you will find that the department as a whole respects mutual holidays equally. For instance, graduation dinner was scheduled to be outside of Ramadan so no one would be fasting.”

RESIDENT SURVEY RESPONSES

How do the residents feel about being part of such a melting pot of humanity during their training program? When asked in an anonymous survey, “Do you enjoy the racial/ethnic diversity among your neurosurgical resident group?”, 100 percent of the residents responded positively. They then went on to elaborate, saying such things as:

“I love our group and its diversity. My great-grandparents were immigrants, so even though I am more removed from the experience, I appreciate how extra smart and hardworking my co-residents and their families who are [immigrants] had to be to get this far.”

“While we all integrate into neurosurgery in a similar fashion, our different experiences and backgrounds help us integrate on a personal level in a unique fashion.”

“Diversity brings different perspectives and different backgrounds and different solutions. It is via diversity that we learn more about ourselves as people and even what it means to be human.”

One of the most insightful remarks by a neurosurgical resident at Henry Ford was that, “Not only is our program diverse, but so is our



hospital. It’s a good reflection of our macro-ecosystem here at HF. Only after this experience here at HF downtown have I been more cognizant of the general lack of diversity in most places beyond.”

ACGME PROFESSIONALISM REQUIREMENTS

The Accreditation Council of Graduate Medical Education requires that every residency training program develops what it calls “Core Competencies,” one of which is “Professionalism.” These are outlined as follows:

- Compassion, integrity and respect for others
- Responsiveness to patient needs that supersedes self-interest
- Respect for patient privacy and autonomy
- Accountability to patients, society and the profession
- Sensitivity and responsiveness to a diverse patient population, including but not limited to diversity in gender, age, culture, race, religion, disabilities and sexual orientation

Henry Ford Department of Neurosurgery excels in these goals, especially the latter, thanks to the diversity of its devoted resident staff. One resident, in particular, gave this description of the atmosphere of the training program, saying, “I’ve always felt like an outsider, never really fit in anywhere – but here, everyone is so unique, I feel like the only thing I have to do to ‘fit in’ is to be myself.” Quite an endorsement!

BEVERLY C. WALTERS, M.D., MSC, FRCSC, FACS
Director of Clinical Research
Henry Ford Department of Neurosurgery