Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at HSS Journal

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The United States remains plagued by racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, and other inequities from which medicine, science, and medical publishing are not immune. At HSS Journal, we have taken the step of organizing a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee of members of our editorial board.

As committee chair (L.A.B), editor-in-chief (C.N.C.), and managing editor (J.J.) of the journal, we recognize that the need for change remains urgent: studies have shown that minority patients experience disparate health outcomes in general and in orthopedics specifically [1,6,7,13,15]. Reducing such disparities in health and health care requires a careful, dedicated, and aggressive restructuring of systems, mindsets, and cultures; indeed, DEI efforts in medical research are important because they allow physicians and other clinicians to better understand and serve patients [14], to spotlight emerging trends in disparities, and to intervene before harmful trends become solidified [1]. DEI efforts within orthopedic surgery are especially important given the field’s persisting lack of gender, racial, and ethnic diversity in its workforce [3,8–11] and resulting health inequities [1]. Promotion of DEI in the fields concerned with musculoskeletal health will ultimately provide patients with greater access to the high-quality talent that is characteristic of diverse and inclusive workforces.

Unfortunately, the world of scholarly journal publishing is not exempt from such inequities. A recent survey of editors at 25 leading medical and scientific journals found that more than 75% were white [12], and a study of the 15 highest-impact orthopedic journals found that women constituted just 9% of their editorial boards [5]. Our publisher, SAGE, has signed on as a partner in the Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Communications, which was founded in 2017 in acknowledgment that scholarly publications are “truly a global enterprise yet that diversity is not reflected in our collective demographics” [2].

At HSS Journal, our DEI Committee has based our DEI strategy on 4 pillars intended to organize our commitment as editors, board members, and reviewers. The 4 pillars direct us to become more able, active, attentive, and accountable (the four A’s) in reaching our DEI goals and to better serve readers and authors. We aim to do the following to advance DEI at our journal.

Issuing Author Guidelines

Our DEI committee has developed guidelines for authors that encourage fairness, equity, consistency, and clarity when reporting on topics that address health disparities; this is in line with other recently published guidelines encouraging authors to carefully consider the terminology used when describing patients and populations, particularly their race and ethnicity [4]. We have posted our new guidelines and a checklist for the reporting of race and ethnicity in all submissions (https://journals.sagepub.com/author-instructions/HSS).

As Flanagin et al have written, we ask authors to be aware that race and ethnicity are social constructs with no biological basis, and therefore they provide limited utility in understanding medical research, practice, and policy. However, these terms may be useful as a focus for studying racism, inequity, and disparity in health care [4].

These guidelines encourage language that avoids unintentional bias. For example, our checklist guides authors in describing participants’ race and ethnicity by asking authors to identify the source of the data (self-reported, investigator-observed, or gathered from a database). In addition, when reporting on racial or ethnic disparities, we ask authors to discuss the implications of their findings as they relate to institutional or structural racism and the health of the populations being studied. We have also

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updated our list of keywords authors may choose from when submitting to include terms relevant to DEI issues.

Encouraging DEI-Related Research
We are challenging our board to solicit, fairly review, and publish high-quality DEI-related research and aim to promote DEI through webinars, social media, editorials, and special issues. We are actively pursuing a more diverse and inclusive editorial board, as well as reviewers, focusing on those with DEI expertise. We aim to maintain and continually update clear submission guidelines for DEI-related research.

Gathering Data
As these efforts are developed, we will flag DEI-related manuscripts and gather specific data regarding rates of submission, acceptance, and readership and compare these data with our overall submissions. In addition, we will invite authors of DEI-related manuscripts to provide a “DEI Summary Statement” on the importance of their findings. The statements will be highlighted in the published article, in print and online, and in social media posts.

Holding Ourselves Accountable
The editorial staff and board are accountable for the rollout of this effort. HSS Journal’s DEI committee will convene quarterly, with a focus on self-assessment and purposeful growth. In assessing our manuscript solicitation and review processes, our DEI committee will encourage honest dialogue surrounding areas of improvement. When this assessment reveals common themes, we will educate authors on research tips for writing DEI-related manuscripts. Finally, we will share specific indicators of our progress with readers at least annually.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared the following potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Lauren A. Barber, MD, reports committee membership with North American Spine Society and American Orthopaedic Association, outside the submitted work. Charles N. Cornell, MD, reports a relationship with Exactech, outside the submitted work. Joy Jacobson reports no potential conflicts of interest.

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Required Author Forms
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