

December 7, 2022

Susan Rowan, DDS, MS, FACD, FICD
Interim Dean
UIC College of Dentistry
801 S. Paulina St. Room 104
Chicago, IL 60612

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Dear Dr. Rowan,

The National Dental Association (NDA) has served as the conscience of organized dentistry for nearly 110 years and has continuously stood in the breach against the scourge of bigotry, cultural insensitivity, and racism in the dental profession. It is in that spirit that we condemn the reprehensible actions of one of your professors, who recently employed the iconography of a hanging in one of his lectures. The Professor's actions were especially abhorrent as there are few images as disturbing as the noose, given its cruel history as a tool of racial oppression.

Lynching is a supreme act of terror and a weapon of intimidation. Its purpose is to dehumanize the victim as much as it is to maim, murder and strike fear in an entire community. The use of such a hateful image has no place in the training of dentists and cannot be condoned. Only the most corrosive of mindsets could conceive of a teaching construct involving such a horrifying image. The Professor's careless disregard for the impact of such a display is a disqualifying offense for one engaged in the education of healthcare professionals.

Sadly, this is not the first such incident that the NDA has been forced to confront in recent years. Last year the NDA rose to the defense of one of our members who was verbally assaulted by a Dental Professor for telling the inspiring story of how she promotes diversity and inclusion in the dental profession. We noted then that **“racism is born of that insidious combination of ignorance and racial privilege”**. Sadly, the despicable incident at your institution reinforces the reality that such ignorance and racial privilege continues to exist in academia.

Universities, at their best, are citadels of enlightenment and free expression, but classrooms, at their best, must be places of psychological safety for all who enter them. By his actions, your professor denied his students their

NDA Family Organizations

fundamental human right to psychological safety. Insipid statements of apology hastily drafted by university lawyers, announcing impotent diversity task forces and university wide fora on racial reconciliation, cannot repair that breach of trust and pedagogical responsibility.

We note with optimism that in recent years some have joined our long-standing cause and taken up the challenge of eliminating barriers to access for underserved populations in the dental profession. But it should be self-evident that racism in dental education is the biggest barrier to professional diversity of all. It is irrefutable that repeated instances of racial insensitivity, white supremacy and bigotry in the admissions offices, laboratories, and classrooms of America's colleges of dentistry cause a chilling effect on the development of a more diverse student population. When presented with such directly offensive assaults, why wouldn't even the sturdiest of students choose more psychologically uplifting academic options?

In the interest of putting an end to the persistent outrage of racism in dental education, the National Dental Association demands that immediate sanctions be levied against the Professor in question. Nothing short of punitive measures are required to respond to the ease with which racist dog whistles continue to infect educational settings. If increasing the number of diverse voices in the dental profession is an important goal for UIC College of Dentistry, this is the only path to redemption.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Keith Andrew Perry, JD". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and "P".

Keith Andrew Perry, JD
Executive Director

Cc: Darryl D. Pendleton, D.M.D.
Associate Dean for Student & Diversity Affairs