

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

We read with great interest the paper by R Lala et al. (2021) entitled *A Critical Analysis of Under-representation of Racialised Minorities in the UK Dental Workforce* (CDH September 2021). We welcome many of the findings and find the discussion very thought provoking. We would also like to respond to comments made about the BDA.

This depth of research is commended and invaluable in understanding the issues of racism in dentistry laid bare. The concept of the leaky pipeline is a well-established model of how discrimination occurs throughout the education and training pathways of professionals and is used to good effect here in illustrating the arguments.

The author draws to our attention a disturbing picture that Black men are discriminated against across the socioeconomic range because they are seen as threatening. This is illustrated in that Black people are nine times more likely to be stopped and searched by police than White people. Even worse, Black people are 18 times more likely to be stopped under section 60 (no reasonable suspicion required). Against this societal backdrop, it is hardly surprising that Black men in particular are underrepresented in dentistry and experience some of the worst racial discrimination during their education and training years. In 2018 *The Independent* (Busby, 2018) reported that Black students seeking a place at university are 21 times more likely to have their UCAS applications investigated for suspected false or missing information than their White counterparts. Universities must do better than explain this away as 'unconscious bias'. The recent open letter by Black medical students at University of Aberdeen Medical School gives hope that there can finally be a cultural change (Ngwria *et al.*, 2021). It behoves all dental organisations to understand how they can become allies in tackling racism.

It could be an informative exercise to overlay an economic model to understand the degree of wastage in cold financial terms that racism causes. However, the much greater losses to the dental workforce caused by racism are those of talent, commitment, passion, and diverse insights which are incalculable.

The BDA has worked assiduously in the last year to investigate, understand and tackle the causes of racism in dentistry. We have undertaken a nation-wide survey of dentists to record individuals' experiences and have sought to comprehend and exercise our role in tackling the many facets of racism that sadly exist within dentistry.

Alongside that work, we have carried out an extensive governance review asking our committee members how we can improve representation and diversity among the elected representatives. It is hard to control the diversity of our committees, including the principle executive committee (PEC). Under trade union law PEC members cannot be appointed. BDA members may elect their representatives from a diverse pool of candidates, but unfortunately that diversity is not always upheld by the votes. The BDA is nevertheless committed to improving our governance processes to support diversity in all its forms, not just protected characteristics. Our immediate past President, Russ Ladwa, was instrumental in supporting our focus on racism in dentistry and we have dental leaders within the BDA and beyond to champion and promulgate this work in the future.

Drs Shareena Ilyas and Dr Laura Cross  
Directors of the BDA  
Co-Chairs EDI Committee

### References

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- Lala, R., Baker, S.R. and Muirhead, V.E. (2021): A Critical Analysis of Underrepresentation of Racialised Minorities in the UK Dental Workforce. *Community Dental Health* **38**, 142–149.
- Ngwria, W., Eze, J., Robertson, I., and the members of the Black Medical Society, Olalade, D., Robinson-Burke, T., OIredia, O., I., Osuntoki, Asare, J., Iguodala, O., Okoh, E., Jesuloba, T. and Agboola, B. (2021): Open letter To Professor Patey & the staff at the University of Aberdeen Medical School. Available at: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1J9A2UMu5B6mp109-2pIPUERrCJzTKY-umxdEWxp6DSu0/edit?fbclid=IwAR0zfEyMsAhPY6eWBn8OvgAJ4-hA0d7FAJfLMRWYrzVhSPSebYWN-g01OW0>