

On behalf of Nick Kates, Chair, Department of Psychiatry & Behavioural Neurosciences –

Like all of us I was shocked, saddened and a little scared to witness the unconscionable killing of George Floyd and to see not only the pain it has caused, but also the justifiable anger within black communities across the US that erupted in its aftermath. Especially as it is these communities which have borne a disproportionate share of the physical, emotional and economic burden of CoVID-19. So as Department Chair I want to add my voice to those who have expressed their outrage at what took place in Minneapolis, and in many other places across the U.S., and to express our solidarity with those who are fighting racial injustice and inequity wherever it may be occurring.

But racism, and the anxiety its shadow creates, are things that many black Canadians experience too, in their communities, workplaces and social interactions. I therefore want to reaffirm our commitment as a Department, consistent with that of McMaster University, to understanding the pernicious ways in which systemic racism can infect our institutions and behaviours, including our own unconscious biases; to promoting conversations that will bring these issues into the open; and to doing all we can to eradicate racism and microaggressions in our own structures and processes, creating environments and cultures where every individual is valued and respected and their contributions welcomed, irrespective of race, religion or culture. As to how we move forward from here, we will be starting with a discussion at the Department Executive next week, and then at our Department Meeting on June 17th.

And hopefully, as we emerge from the more acute “medical” stages of the pandemic, there will be a brief window to bring about some of the wider societal changes that could lead to a fairer and more just society, if we are ready to take full advantage of any such opportunities that should arise.

Nick Kates