

MPPDA

Medicine-Pediatrics Program Directors Association

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February 15, 2021

Dear MPPDA Community,

We as faculty and program directors in the combined specialty of Internal Medicine and Pediatrics stand in solidarity with our colleague and Med-Peds family member Dr. Princess Dennar and the Medicine-Pediatrics residents of Tulane.

While we are unable to comment on the specifics of Dr. Dennar's case, the ACGME reports from the 2018 site visit at Tulane state that they were unable to exclude race or gender discrimination as a cause for the deficiencies cited. In addition, they cited the structural conflict of interest that existed in the composition of the graduate medical education committee that was never resolved, which unfairly advantaged the categorical program and unfairly disadvantaged the combined program. The relationship between programs was found to be uncooperative and unhealthy with the added finding that Dr. Dennar's authority as Program Director had been violated.

The Combined Internal Medicine and Pediatrics specialty is unique in that it requires the cooperation, collaboration and support of the categorical Internal Medicine and Pediatrics programs to be successful. The rigor of the curriculum along with the limited number of training spots naturally makes it one of the more selective and competitive specialties where the expectation is to master both disciplines at the level of each categorical specialty. The lack of support exhibited by the Tulane Internal Medicine Program and GMCEC that has been shared and documented by multiple entities, including the ACGME is worrisome for our entire profession, and goes against our core principles as medical educators.

Further, we expect ACGME to hold allegations of racism and sexism to the same "zero tolerance" standard that they hold duty hour violations within a training program. Both contribute to a culture of safety, and we need to make sure that our residents, faculty members and program directors are operating in a safe program. Based on allegations of harassment, we expect that ACGME is investigating and ensuring resident safety at Tulane. Given the absolute severity of these allegations of racism, we are concerned that the ACGME has recently chosen to remove Tulane from warning status.

Dr. Dennar is a valued member of our national Med-Peds Community, and her program has consistently produced excellent graduates. Importantly, she has specifically been mindful of the need to recruit and train a diverse workforce and has successfully and consistently done so during her tenure in program leadership. Perhaps most concerning to us as a community, is it seems that this effort (which is in line with the Institute of Medicine's recommendations and supported by several studies over the past 20 years demonstrating the urgent need to diversify the health professions) has at best been overlooked at her local institution, and at worst been undermined.

Dr. Camara Jones teaches us that racism is a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks (which is what we call "race"), that unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities, unfairly advantages other individuals and communities, and saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources.

Dr. Dennar's dismissal is shocking, and highly concerning for a lack of transparency, cause, or due process. As national peers of hers, and as a group that helps to set the national standards for excellence in what it means to be a medicine-pediatrics program director, we welcome transparency in the due process afforded to Dr. Dennar. Her dismissal is a prime example of how the strengths of societies are weakened through the waste of human resources. There is an epidemic of loss in academia, with Black faculty at the forefront of this attrition as detailed most recently by Dr. Uche Blackstock's article "Why Black Doctors like me are leaving faculty positions in academic medical centers." With the low number of black program directors, the loss of one is tremendous. As her colleagues, we are as devastated as we are disappointed in the system. The outcry from former residents, current residents and medical students is a testament to her dedication, compassion and talent as an educator. Dr. Dennar is a tremendous asset to the Med-Peds community. We hope that our academic organizations and accrediting bodies will boldly address the issues at hand and prove that their commitment to diversity and inclusion are not empty words, but true statements of accountability that result in action. Medical education must do better if we are to keep our best and our brightest for the sake of our patients and our society.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mike Aylward *

Dr. Stefanie Brown *

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