



## Memorandum

**Date:** June 4, 2020

**To:** WellSpace Health Colleagues

**From:** A. Jonathan Porteus, Ph.D.  
Chief Executive Officer

**Re:** Mid-Month Message: Hearing George Floyd – Part II

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We all know what happened on Memorial Day.

Derrick Johnson, President and CEO of the NAACP, said *“Enough is enough. The entire country has reached its limit in terms of deadly police practices. We cannot allow one more Black person to die at the hands of government. Our #WeAreDoneDying campaign is aimed at eliminating racial disparities that are harming our communities and taking our lives. Nowhere is there more systemic injustice than in law enforcement’s treatment of the Black community it is charged with guarding and protecting. We must seize this moment to eliminate racism from policing and to hold every officer accountable for his or her actions.”*

Former President Jimmy Carter, resonating with the pain of the *“tragic racial injustices and consequent backlash across our nation in recent weeks”* said *“our hearts are with the victims’ families and all who feel hopeless in the face of pervasive racial discrimination and outright cruelty. We all must shine a spotlight on the immorality of racial discrimination.”*

Michelle Obama shone that spotlight, saying *“I’m exhausted by a heartbreak that never seems to stop. Right now it’s George, Breonna, and Ahmaud. Before that it was Eric, Sandra, and Michael. It just goes on, and on, and on. Race and racism is a reality that so many of us grow up learning to just deal with. But if we ever hope to move past it, it can’t just be on people of color to deal with it. It’s up to all of us—Black, white, everyone—no matter how well-meaning we think we might be, to do the honest, uncomfortable work of rooting it out. It starts with self-examination and listening to those whose lives are different from our own. It ends with justice, compassion, and empathy that manifests in our lives and on our streets. I pray we all have the strength for that journey, just as I pray for the souls and the families of those who were taken from us.”*

His face ground into the pavement, his life draining from him, George Floyd said ***“Momma! Momma! I’m through.”***



People often call to their mother as they are dying. George Floyd’s mother died two years ago but in a matter of minutes, out of the blue, he was calling out to her. If we stood before Larcenia Jones Floyd what is it that we would say to her? JFK said *“ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country,”* and Michelle Obama says that racism and race are realities that, however uncomfortable, we need to root out through self-examination and listening. We need to hear George Floyd and countless others and commit to a change in front of his and all other mothers.

There is not some single statement about this. It’s a process. So I will be sending a series of messages over the next weeks with some suggestions for how we delve in to the work of addressing racism and race. We might not feel like we can change others, but we can change ourselves. Some of these messages will contain familiar content, because we keep addressing it and it keeps happening. Some will suggest strategies for self-examination and change. Some will be about social learning and changing opinion through better understanding. And let’s not

trivialize this issue by saying it's just a law enforcement thing, because it's as endemic in our culture as our Coronavirus is pandemic. It's the lingering consequence of hundreds of years of belief and action, a legacy of one group owning the bodies of another that pops up and hits us in the face everywhere, as in the streets of Minneapolis or when someone is asked to leash their dog in Central Park, or when selling water or barbequing at Lake Merritt in Oakland. And it's a legacy of one group owning the bodies of another that is often hard to see as it oozes insidiously in policies, institutions and movements.

I'll start the next message with my February Mid-Month message that I never sent out. COVID-19 hit us hard that month and I chose to hold my message about Black History Month for fear that it would get lost in the pandemic, and out of anticipation that we would see social and ethnic inequities even in the way the pandemic rolled over us.

Be well,  
Jonathan

***The "Mid-Month Message" is intended as a place to share pieces of our organizational culture and/or history. As our tagline says, WellSpace Health has been providing care in our community since 1953. Over the decades we have developed quite an organizational culture. We have had many accomplishments, created histories, have profoundly affected so many, and have been profoundly affected by so many. Sometimes it's hard to keep up with it all. And often, one part of the organization may not know about something affecting another part of the organization.***