Letter From The Editor

In 2020 the United States was faced with two separate and yet intertwined crises that challenged both the health and safety of its people, and the very idea of what this nation represents. The first challenge was an external one, COVID-19; it caused the death of thousands of our countrymen and sickened millions more. The second crisis, the central role of racism in American life, was a crisis of our own creation and one that finds its origins in the very founding of what would become our nation more than four hundred years ago. The murder of George Floyd was only the latest example of this racism brought to bear in everyday life, but Floyd’s death in 2020 gave new energy to a movement that reckoned with the role racism plays in the life of all Americans. It was a phenomenon we all witnessed even as we continue to fight COVID-19 and see the disparate impacts the virus has on people of color and the poor.

The American Society of Law, Medicine & Ethics has long been interested in exploring this area; in the 1980s the society made health disparities one of our core areas of interest in our mission statement. The past year has brought ample opportunities to explore those disparities. This JLME issue that you hold in your hands is the first of two issues that will examine racism and health in the United States. It contains the symposium “Race and Ethnicity in 21st Century Health Care,” which is guest-edited by Laura Specker Sullivan and Robert M. Sade. In early 2022, we will publish another symposium exploring the issue from some broader perspectives with a symposium on Health Law and Anti-Racism.

This symposium, which is part of the longstanding partnership between JLME and the Thomas Pitts Memorial Lectureship at the Medical University of South Carolina, explores many of the broader questions around racism and health care while also bringing a number of deeply personal stories into the light as well. While some of the articles in the symposium explore affirmative action in medical school admissions, critical race theory, health equity, and social justice, two articles, one by Thaddeus John Bell and one by Lenworth Jacobs, each take an autobiographical approach as the authors explore their own paths to becoming a physician and their efforts in fighting the racism they faced along the way. These deeply fascinating personal stories add depth and context to the broader work we offer elsewhere in the collection of papers. We are proud to publish this important work and look forward to bring our readers more of it in the coming year and beyond.

Ted Hutchinson
Editor
JLME