



Dear Team,

I wanted to reach out to you, my CHNWF family, to let you know that I am thinking of each of you as we watch the news of protests on race and police brutality over the past several days. I recognize the strong emotions that this stirs in each of us.

We are all trying to process the recent events that we are seeing in the news – the tragic and senseless deaths of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery; we are also reminded of the countless others who came before them (Eric Garner, Philando Castile and Trayvon Martin, to name a few). We've witnessed the subsequent demonstrations and protests, both peaceful and violent, that have swept the nation. I see the fear, anxiety, frustration and desperation of those who are standing shoulder to shoulder in solidarity giving voice to their anger about violence to black people and larger racial injustices. My hope is that our local, state and federal leadership will hear the message that it is time to make transformational change to enact policies that provide justice for *all* marginalized groups.

Our organizational history has strong roots in addressing health and social inequities throughout our community. In recent years, our programs have been more embedded in disenfranchised communities such as Oakwood Terrace, relocating our main service delivery site to Jackson Street, and the establishment of a 20 year MOU with Weis Elementary. Although these are valiant efforts and ones we should be proud of – this is not enough. Community Health Northwest Florida was built upon a platform in which ALL people are created equal. Just as our Mission suggests, we must treat not only our patients, but also *each other* with respect, dignity and compassion **regardless of** age, gender, race, religion or misconceived bias. It is time for us to band together in solidarity to bring a voice to the voiceless, advocating for justice and the inalienable rights of all. Community Health Northwest Florida should be a beacon of hope and safe place for those in our community that we are here to serve. We must challenge ourselves each and every day to ensure that those who walk through our doors and seek our help are received with the dignity, respect and the kindness they deserve.

In addition to those we serve, my first responsibility and priority to you as the leader of this organization is to create a safe space where all employees are comfortable speaking up about what they are going through and feeling. We are a mix of races, genders, ethnicities, religions and sexual identities, and our past history and life experience makes us who we are. Sadly, many of our team members have experienced the effects of systemic racism or other marginalization during their lives. Last year, we created the Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Committee. Under the leadership of Sandra Donaldson, this committee with membership from across the organization, has met several times but was put on hold (like so many other things) when the Covid-19 crisis hit. The D&I Committee aims to help all of us to “Connect to Purpose”, bridge gaps, and to share communication among our patients and staff. The committee’s goal is to give a safe place to share ideas and concerns that you and our patients may face; this feedback will be shared with leadership to create actionable steps. We can better serve our patients and the community by growing in understanding and acceptance of each other. I hope that we will soon be able to resume the D&I meetings and continue our work in this space.

In my very first video message to you, I quoted Ascension’s President Joe Impicciche. I will close this message by reiterating his profound words:

*“If ever there was a time to take courage and stay strong – this is that time.
If ever there was a time to listen and support one another – this is that time.
And... If ever there was a time to pray for our country – this IS that time.”*

Peace,

Chandra