DEI Reflection

As part of my DEI training and growth process, I read the book *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander. What was really impactful about this book was the method in which Alexander laid out the history and facts of the social issues that Black Americans have faced in the sphere of criminal justice. Just as a medical scholarly article would be written with sources and in a logical form, this book follows this structure in a very thorough way. The end result created a book with a larger impact on me, due to the overwhelming nature of the amount of evidence that was included.

 I considered myself somewhat educated in the sphere of criminal justice and how it relates to racial inequalities in America, but I realized I only have scratched the surface of the information out there and realizing the reality that many Americans face. It was hard to read at points due to how helpless you feel about the situation and the frustration I felt when I realized how many misconceptions or intentional lies are common when discussing criminal justice. It also made me consider that if there is that much misinformation and such a large systemic structure working against Black people in this sphere, there likely is much more of a similar influence in the medical field that I realize. When reflecting on this book and how it changed my thoughts after reading it, I also realized how important it is for us to question biases in our own profession and lives. For example, I consistently saw the theme of a statistic that, when used out of context paints a certain group of people in a negative light or seems to explain a disparity, but when context is applied it is completely different. This is also true in our field and shows why it is important to ask the question of “why” when examining social issues. For example, if we see worse health outcomes in a specific low-income community, we should not assume they eat worse by choice or don’t want to be healthy. You have to ask why and be willing to examine all the main factors to be able to conclude what is really contributing to those health statistics. The last take-away I had, although this might not be as applicable to my professional life, is the importance of trying to let go of a stigma against individuals who have been charged with crimes or served prison time in the past. It also makes me think of those that work in the criminal justice system and the need of people caught in this system. In a similar fashion, the documentary movie *13th* had a similar impact on me, highlighting the importance of listening to individuals who state they need help and avoiding assumptions about anyone.

Another component I completed as part of my DEI growth process was to participate in discussion events and learning opportunities. I was fortunate to be able to do this first through events held through the UNC Allied Health Science program called Community Conversations. The first one I attended was centered around specific scenarios and was an exercise in empathizing with others. This helped me by having tough conversations with people I did know well, which made me consider many viewpoints that I had not thought of previously. Another discussion I participated in was the DEI group meetings during my clinical internship at Duke Health. These were especially helpful, as the leaders of these meetings were very well informed on the subject and led very powerful teaching opportunities that applied directly to our clinical practice. The first meeting I attended included a discussion of healthcare disparities between people of color, especially in relation to pregnancy and childbirth. I was unaware of the magnitude of the difference in outcomes and it drove the point home that each patient’s complaints, symptoms, and fears need to be considered as equally valid. Many of the victims of these situations had voiced concerns that were not listened, and as our profession often deals with the issue of pain, it is a reminder that you need to trust the patient as the most reliable narrator of their own health and be their advocate, not another barrier in this process.