

Supplementary Data

Letter Written by Jasmine Solola

I am a Black student taking the USMLE Step 1 exam on Thursday, June 11. I have not had time to grieve, I have not had time to feel, and I have not had time to hurt – because in order for me to pass this exam I am required to be hyperfocused and undistracted. A luxury that I do not have. I will sit for my exam Thursday, June 11 in downtown Chicago in a city that has erupted in anger. I am a Black woman who will walk through a grieving city to sit for an exam that largely dictates my future, graded on a curve composed of persons who, for the most part, are not weighed by the same burden. This is a gross disparity. A solution would be for the exam to move into its Pass/Fail phase, a move that will be enacted in 2022. It was cited that this exam would not change because of stakeholders' operational restrictions and time restraints. I am a stakeholder. This exam is second in a lineage of tests that will allow me to join the 5% of Black physicians in the US. A percentage stuck in place because of obvious structural and institutional racism and because exams like this are not examined under the lens for equity reform.

To not make this exam pass/fail is an injustice to all students experiencing drastic inequities and disparity during this time. A pandemic that has erupted mental health instability, food and housing insecurity, and disproportionately affecting people of color in every way. A racial revolution with intimidation overarching peaceful protests and moments of solidarity. To not have moved to pass/fail at the beginning was a huge oversight by the USMLE, NBME, and entities in charge of delivering this exam. They did not even take it into “consideration.” These establishments who have the responsibility to create equal and safe gateways for students in the pursuit of joining the medical profession instead are complicit in the many factors regulating

inequities in the health care work force. A profession that by its definition should reflect the needs of the people it serves, a reflection that wouldn't in this time pass a test in the mirror.

I am sitting for this exam because I need to. After months of dedicated study with test cancellations and uncertainty, I need to get past this obstacle preventing me from being an active part of society and this narrative.

I will sit for this exam in solidarity for my Black brothers and sisters murdered because the color of their skin changed the mood of their murderers. I will sit for this exam because my children need to know that they can overcome the barriers forced upon them that don't burden their white counterparts who fill every room. I will sit for this exam because the next day I will be freed to march alongside everyone, demanding equality and making moves towards change that need to happen now. I will PASS this exam understanding that it is simply necessary in order for me to become one of the few Black doctors in America, standing up for an allying with Black patients disproportionately affected by illness and deserving not only better health care, but better treatment in this country.

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