

Tackling systemic racism requires the system of science to change

In response to the global Black Lives Matter protests, many institutions pledged actions to combat racism. That's not enough.

Next week marks a year since the murder of George Floyd, and nearly a year since the Black Lives Matter protests compelled numerous institutions – including many in research – to acknowledge systemic racism. These events made universities, institutes, corporations, museums, societies, publishers and funders confront racial injustice in a way that had never happened before.

As part of that response, *Nature* recognized systemic racism in science and our part in it, and committed to stand against it.

We know that such statements must be followed by actions. At *Nature*, we have made it an editorial priority to expose and tackle racism in science by publishing more research, commentary and journalism about racism and racial injustice. Next year, we will produce a special issue, under the guidance of a group of external editors, that examines systemic racism in research. We will be launching a news internship for Black journalists later this year. We are taking further steps to diversify our authors, reviewers and contributors. And we know that too few of our editorial staff are people of colour, so we are working to change this.

The other journals and teams in the Nature Portfolio are also forging stronger connections with communities of Black researchers; and our publisher, Springer Nature, has made commitments to champion diversity internally and in the communities it serves. Its Black Employee Network, formed in August 2020, has made valuable contributions to editorial policy and to elevating Black voices in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Many other journals and science publishers have also made welcome changes.

But we know we are only at the foothills; there is a mountain ahead. We need to do much more, and are determined to do so. At the same time, we recognize that such pledges and actions, by themselves, do not constitute systemic change.

Racism in science is endemic because the systems that produce and teach scientific knowledge have, for centuries, misrepresented, marginalized and mistreated people of colour and under-represented communities. The research system has justified racism – and, too often,

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scientists in positions of power have benefited from it. That system includes the organization of research: how it is funded, published and evaluated.

Ending systemic racism will therefore require those in the system, including *Nature*, to collectively acknowledge and study these facts, and to ask: how and why did this happen? We need to thoroughly understand the root causes, even as we seek energetically to remedy the ongoing damage. Some have already started down this road. Projects at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge and the University of Glasgow, UK, have investigated these institutions' past ties to the slave trade and how they prospered from it, helping to build a more accurate and complete account of science history.

Hundreds of individual organizations have pledged actions to combat racism. All of these are important, but on their own they will not bring about the systemic change that is required. One essential change all institutions can make today is to put the right incentives in place. They must ensure that anti-racism is embedded in their organization's objectives and that such work wins recognition and promotion. Too often, conventional metrics – citations, publication, profits – reward those in positions of power, rather than helping to shift the balance of power.

A second change institutions should make is to come together to tackle racism, as some already are. At the very least, this means talking to and learning from a wide range of communities, and transcending conventional boundaries to team up. Funders, research institutions and publishers must work together to ensure that research from diverse scientists is funded and published. As part of the system of science, *Nature* is starting to develop such partnerships, and we look forward to doing more. Together, we will move further, faster.

Universal health care is a priority – even amid COVID

A focus on specific diseases has derailed efforts to achieve health care for all before. The world must not repeat that mistake with COVID-19.

Vaccinating the world's population against COVID-19 remains a global health priority. But it is vital that this effort does not overshadow the need to ensure that everyone, everywhere has access to basic health care.

Despite the urgency of the current crisis, the provision of universal health care remains a priority for Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO). It is also enshrined in the