



## Penn Center for AIDS Research

June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Dear CFAR Community,

HIV/AIDS is a disease of disparities - socially and economically disadvantaged and marginalized populations are the most vulnerable and bear the greatest burden of this disease. We are all dedicated to preventing, treating, ameliorating and eradicating HIV/AIDS - some of us focus on molecular determinants, some on immunological determinants, some on the social and economic determinants – but at its root the disease is driven by social and economic injustices.

It is now nearly three months since the upsurge of the COVID19 pandemic in the US, and whether it is by reading statistics or walking through our ICUs, we all know how horribly disproportionate the impact has been on our Black and Latinx patients and communities. No one can doubt the critical role of economic and social disparities, as well as the compounding effect of other underlying health disparities, in the disproportionate extent of disease transmission and severity of illness.

It is now one week since we watched the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, and saw on stark video just one more among innumerable examples of how institutionalized racism and violence in our country leads to death in the same vulnerable population.

What links all these together is the role of disparities on the health of vulnerable communities - death by HIV/AIDS, death by COVID19, death by violence - and all the morbidities short of mortality - share common drivers.

The ultimate goal of biomedical research is to improve the health and lives of people. As researchers, scientists and healthcare providers, it seems that we have a three-fold responsibility when confronted with the health outcomes of such disparities.

First is to ensure that everyone within our medical and research community are safe, valued and appreciated. Please do everything you can to communicate with your lab members, trainees and colleagues of color that they are valued and supported, and encourage an open line of communication to learn about those things that make them feel less so in our CFAR community. And if you hear of such instances within our community, racist speech, injustice - please do not remain silent - speak up and make it clear that it is NOT ok!

Second is to ensure that as HIV/AIDS scientists and care providers, we recognize and address the common drivers of these overlapping epidemics. We cannot reasonably expect to impact OUR disease without targeting the structural disparities that allow it to flourish in concert with the myriad other health consequences that go in tandem. We are very proud of the work being done within the CFAR to address and reduce disparities fueling the epidemic, no matter the critical part of the challenge that is our personal focus.

Finally, as scientists and healthcare providers, we are in a unique position to raise our voices to condemn the institutionalized racism that leads to chronic and acute health issues, suffering and injustice wreaked on vulnerable members of our society. Because our professions are respected, because health is in our purview, and because as human beings it is right to denounce injustice and degradation of human dignity, we share a responsibility to speak up and add our voices of condemnation to the outrageous violations that are occurring. And for us as individuals, we are committed to listening, working to better understand the issues affecting communities of color, and amplifying and expanding space for their voices in our CFAR community.

We have heard from many in the CFAR community about their individual efforts to lend their support to this fight for justice, and we applaud you. We will be participating in the **White Coats for Black Lives** national kneel for 10 min in remembrance of George Floyd **tomorrow Friday, June 5, at 1 pm at Franklin Field**, and in the Penn Cares march from HUP to City Hall which will begin shortly thereafter, and we welcome any of you to join us. We are hopeful that over the next days and weeks there will be additional opportunities for us as a biomedical community to speak up to condemn these injustices and demand reform.

Sincerely,

Ron Collman  
Robert Gross  
Kate Gordon  
Amanda Bell

# #WhiteCoatsForBlackLives

Friday June 5<sup>th</sup> at 1:00pm



All are welcome to join as we step outside and kneel for 8 minutes 46 seconds  
In remembrance of George Floyd and countless others

Masks and social distancing mandatory