



September 30, 2021

## Road Map Bulletin 6: Mount Sinai's Policy on Dealing With Racist Behavior from Patients and Guests

Happy Thursday Mount Sinai Community –

In past bulletins, we've discussed structural racism, but today we'd like to address a topic that we've recently received comments and questions about: Individual racism and how Mount Sinai handles interactions with patients and guests exhibiting racist behavior.

For Mount Sinai team members of color, these types of interactions are—sadly—nothing new. To help address it, Mount Sinai recently instituted **a new policy to guide employees during these interactions, with a focus on stopping the harmful behavior and supporting our colleagues** in both clinical and nonclinical settings.



This policy was created by a coalition of administrators, physicians, and senior leadership, including **Pamela Abner**, Vice President and Chief Diversity Operations Officer for Mount Sinai Hospitals Group, **Tamiesha Frempong**, MD,

MPH, Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology at the Icahn School of Medicine; and **Erica Rubinstein**, Vice President of Service Excellence and Patient Experience for the Mount Sinai Health System. The policy formalizes what has always been expected: hateful, discriminatory, racist, bigoted, or abusive speech or behavior will not be tolerated, while also including a distinct focus on supporting the staff members who are targeted by this behavior.

We encourage everyone to read the policy (available [here](#)), talk with their teams, and make a plan on how they would deal with a racist patient on their units. The team that created this policy has also partnered with Talent Development and Learning to develop a skills-based training on the policy, which should be released in the coming months.

[View Policy](#)

We also want your help spreading the word that at Mount Sinai, We Stand Together Against Racism. Decals and posters with this messaging have been created, and staff are encouraged to put them up around their units and clinical practices. Managers can purchase these items on Office Depot's [Mount Sinai online store](#). This proactive approach of collective signage and planning will help foster a sense of community within departments, as well as protect our colleagues while they work hard to provide the best patient experience.

As Erica and Tamiesha told us, one of the worst elements of this issue is that sometimes “the staff targeted were not thought of as victims or as being traumatized.” To be clear, any incident of this nature can have deep and lasting impacts, and we all need to make sure we are supporting and helping one another, if this happens.

That’s why the policy is written to empower staff—so care teams can come together, decide on the best path forward, and give the harassed team member the power to decide if they want to continue to care for the patient or not. It also encourages anyone who witnesses racist actions or speech against a colleague to do something about it, including outlining concrete steps for staff to take, from speaking with the patient to creating a behavior plan, restricting privileges, and, eventually, limiting a patient’s access to an ambulatory facility or discharging them (when medically appropriate). For a visitor, visitation privileges can be limited or rescinded altogether.

An anonymous account Erica and Tamiesha shared with us illustrates what this policy looks like in practice:

A busy nursing unit was treating a patient who, every time someone entered the room, the patient referred to the person by their perceived ethnicity—replacing their names with stereotypes and racial epithets.

A nurse who became a particular focus of this patient sought help from her manager, who spoke with the patient, telling him clearly that she heard him refer to staff members in an offensive way, that it would not be tolerated, and asked that he refer to the staff members by their names or “nurse.”

The manager then called a team huddle, informed everyone about the situation and told them she was there to support them and hear their ideas on how they should handle this as a team.

Finally, the manager asked the targeted nurse how **she** wanted to handle the situation, empowering her to decide if she wanted to continue caring for the patient or switch assignments. Critically, the manager told the nurse she would support her in whatever she wanted to do. Even though the patient wasn’t remorseful, his behavior decreased after the intervention, and staff reported feeling grateful that they were all included in the process.

We hope everyone will read the policy, talk about this important topic, keep an eye out for the upcoming training, and reach out to Erica and Tamiesha if they have questions.

**Thanks to the members of the Workgroup for Responding to Racist and Discriminatory Patient Behavior:**

Pamela Abner

Tamiesha Frempong, MD

Kirk Campbell, MD

Bonnie Portnoy

Deborah Korzenik

Brijen Shah, MD

Jacob Appel

Ugo Ezenkwele, MD

Diane Adams

Deborah Dean, MD

Sharon Edwards, MD

Edward Forman, MD

Lorisa Richards

Jo Hirschmann

Amanda Ognibene

If you want to explore these topics further, we hope to see everyone at an upcoming event:

**Chats for Change—The Invention of Whiteness** Whiteness is a socially constructed structure that impacts nearly all aspects of life in American society. Join us on **Tuesday October 5, at noon** as we explore the creation and significance of whiteness and its connection to the persistence of racism in American society. If we are to understand the forces at work in our country today, we must understand the forces that shaped us. To register, click [here](#).

**Latinx Heritage Month: Conversations With Leaders** Sponsored by the Corporate Services Center Diversity Council and Heritage of Latino Alliance Employee Resource Group in celebration of Latinx Heritage Month, these conversations feature leaders from around the Health System sharing their career journeys with employees. For more information email [diversity@mountsinai.org](mailto:diversity@mountsinai.org).

- Join on **Monday, October 4, at 11 am** to hear from **Carlos Maceda, Chief Supply Chain Officer**. Register [here](#).
- Join on **Wednesday, October 6, at 12:30 pm** to hear from **Kelley Gonzalez, Training Instructor, Information Technology**. Register [here](#).

**The Impact of COVID-19 on the Latinx Community** Join the Heritage of Latino Alliance (HOLA) Employee Resource Group on **Wednesday, October 13, at 12:30 PM** for a panel discussion on The Impact of COVID-19 on the Latinx Community, moderated by **Frank Pabon**, Director of Operations, Central Billing Office, Faculty Practice Administration, and featuring panelists **Luz A. Lugo, MD**, Medical Director of the Samuels Clinic at Mount Sinai West, and **Oswaldo Luciano, MSN, MS, RN, NPD-BC**, Clinical Program Manager - Nursing Education at The Mount Sinai Hospital. To register, click [here](#).

All the best,

Angela and Shawn

[Road Map for Action Website](#)