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Why We Can't Wait

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Why We Can't Wait

Mary Insana Fisher, PT, PhD

Editor-in-Chief, *Rehabilitation Oncology*

“We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right.”

The last year and a half have made its mark on history. Much like I learned about my grandparent's experience with the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic, my grandchildren will be reading about 2020 – the year of the COVID-19 pandemic. And much as I learned about the activism of the 1960s, future generations will learn about the activism during the summer of 2020, when George Perry Floyd Jr died at the hands of Derek Chauvin.

The two seemingly disparate events linked only by time – the spring of 2020 – are, in reality, inextricably linked. The pandemic has laid bare clear disparities in health. A study published last year reported that those with lower education levels and areas with greater percentages of Black residents had higher rates of COVID-19 cases and fatalities.(1) A more recent study with even larger data pools (>4m cases) reported that socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic minority status, household composition, and environmental factors were significantly associated with both COVID-19 incidence as well as mortality due to COVID-19.(2) Mr. Floyd was profiled by the police, having a past criminal record, and was stopped and arrested for allegedly passing a counterfeit \$20 bill. He had recently lost his job due to the pandemic. He was in a Black neighborhood. How often are the people we treat who don't look like us profiled as non-compliant, lacking education and therefore understanding, and from a depressed part of town? How does this profiling affect how we treat these individuals?

At a deeper level, questions about how the George Floyds of the world access health care need answering. Our role as rehabilitation practitioners has always included advocacy for those in need; we can parlay our expertise in advocacy toward disparities in cancer rehabilitation. It is essential to reveal the barriers, inequities, and lack of accessibility to rehabilitation services for those with cancer. Even before this, determining what role rehabilitation practitioners may have in preventing cancer needs further study and development. The time is ripe to do right.

In January 2023, *Rehabilitation Oncology* will publish a special issue focusing on Disparities in Cancer Rehabilitation, ably curated by guest editors Lisa Van Hoose, PT, PhD, Bernadette Williams-York, PT, DSc, and Ann Marie Flores, PT, PhD. We are seeking original research examining gaps in access, quality, and affordability of rehabilitation care as well as what impact disparities have on disability in relation to cancer. Our call for papers is available on our website www.rehabonc.com. Interested authors will need to submit a proposal by March 1, 2022.

I have a dream. I dream of a time when social determinants of health do not need to be taught in school. When socioeconomic status and the color of skin has no relation to life expectancy. That

my profession looks like the people we treat. That there is no need to publish a special issue on disparities in cancer rehabilitation. I have a dream that the time is ripe to do right.

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