



View from the Pyramids: Color Blindness

AAOJ Editor-in-Chief Janice Upton Blumer, DO, FAAO

EDITORIAL

I've often heard it said that if we are to resolve racial discord in our society, we need to adopt a "color blind" way of interacting with others. While I believe that this might help in the short term, I don't know if it would work in the long term because it doesn't get to the heart of the problem. The heart of the problem is that we need to see below the surface. We need to see each individual as a story of their life: their past and history, their entire being. We need to 'be' with them, empathize with them, and share in their joys and their sorrows.

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Our country is at a crossroads in its history, with a movement brought out of years of social injustices, but now again in the limelight due to the technology of instant media. There have been many of these pivotal moments in the history of our nation where we later recognize them as the points the tides turned. While I am grieved by the social injustices and look forward to a time when all humans can be seen as humans, I know that my every day actions are the messages that speak the loudest.

As osteopathic physicians, we have been given a gift of seeing the story beneath the color of the skin. We use our hands to “see” our patients, their history and how they have treated themselves along the way. When you see through touch, exterior appearances do not matter. Every individual is on a level playing field when palpation is your ‘go to’ tool. Not only do your hands not lie, they tell the story of what exactly happened to this individual through the tale of the body. So often a returning patient will come into my office with a new haircut or a different look and I won't remember previously seeing them until I examine them with my hands. I think as osteopathic physicians, we are better for it. I say this because exterior appearances change, sometimes for the better and sometimes for

the worse, but if we trust our hands, they will not lie.

When we choose to see a deeper version of our patient, we are given a gift in that way; the true story unfolds: stories of trauma, emotional abuse, physical difficulties, perhaps multiple surgeries, and stories of true healing. It is through empathetically understanding the stories your patients tell that you begin to understand that we, at our cores, are all the same. We may have a different story or exterior of our ‘house’, but we are living and breathing examples of what it means to be truly human. When you look at other humans in this light, exterior appearances fade away.

It is through the stories that my true understanding of my patients develops. It is through the trust they have in me to treat them gently as they navigate these stories that true healing happens. I am grateful to have had the honor to be trusted by my patients regardless of their exterior appearance, socioeconomic background, or the color of their skin. I truly believe that if everyone used this healing power of touch, we could all be in a better place right now. There is a sweetness about it that cannot be found in any other profession.

As the country is navigating the road to racial harmony, osteopathic physicians continue to do the work of attending to our patients' stories and bodies one person at a time. Please join me in recognizing the power of touch to unite our society. Our nation is depending on us.

In Gratitude –

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