

# **Sports Psychiatrists in Solidarity with the Community of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Facing Racial Injustices**

**Friday January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021**

Over the past several months and years, we psychiatrists in the United States have seen our country's dreadful scourge of racism come to a head and at times explode in civil unrest. The outpouring onto American streets of anguish, grief, fear, turmoil, and rage can be best understood as a pent-up reaction to centuries of cruel, often violent injustices continuing unabated with impunity. From healthcare disparities and police brutality, to hate crimes, discriminatory housing practices; daily micro and macro aggressions; and even differential attitudes towards, and treatment of, individuals with respect to COVID19 - active discussions are occurring across the world and in many places, protests have flared.

Lives of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) have been lost or forever altered in racially motivated targeting and violence. Both the incidents and their effects have been seen across the continents worldwide. Although the specific incidents and the affected individuals are far too numerous for us to list them all, we must, at least, acknowledge: the shooting of Jacob Blake and the murders of Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, Philando Castile, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Rayshard Brooks, and the death of Dr. Susan Moore in the United States/North America; the shooting death of Joao Pedro Mattos Pinto in Brazil/South America; the hate crimes against Thabang Mosiako, and murder of Xolisile Ndongzana in South Africa; the deaths of Rashan Charles, Sean Rigg, Roger Sylvester, Joy Gardner and Cynthia Jarrett in the UK/Europe; in Asia, the racist caricature of Black Americans in public broadcast in Japan, and the forced evictions of Africans in China, who have also suffered such indignities as being turned away from restaurants, and arbitrary quarantines and testing during the coronavirus outbreak in that country; and the killings of Joyce Clark, Kumanjayi Walker, Tanya Day, and Ms Dhu in Australia. For these, and far too many others, justice must be served.

We, who include in our number psychiatrists from around the globe, acknowledge that some individuals may be more personally and profoundly affected by these incidents. We stand by you, and we outrightly and emphatically condemn acts of racism and police brutality. Furthermore, we assert that it is, and should be, everyone's concern to address racial inequalities and injustices. We see the need to not only speak out on racism, but to do the work to play our part in helping the world to become anti-racist. As we leave behind Universal Human Rights Month of December 2020, and ring in the new year beginning with World Peace Day on January 1, 2021, we acknowledge that now is the time for continued action, not complacency.

At the collegiate level, many predominantly white institutions build their teams with Black athletes. In fact, in the United States, the sports that generate the greatest revenue for NCAA university athletic

programs -- providing funding for salaries of coaches and administrators and funds to upgrade facilities -- are those in which the majority of the players are Black, such as football and basketball. That representation is rarely replicated in the head coaching staff, athletic director positions, medical teams, or even the surrounding communities. At the same time, BIPOC comprise far too few of the beneficiaries of revenue generated by teams on which Black athletes predominate. Similarly, while there is high representation of BIPOC among athletes in certain professional sports leagues -- such as in the NFL, NBA, and WNBA -- it remains true that only a small fraction of the top professional positions in those organizations are held by any people of color, let alone Black people. It is our endeavor to help establish and support racial equity in these settings as well.

We also recognize that the current sociopolitical climate sets the stage for a high stakes game for athletes when it comes to activism. In addition to public scrutiny for differing views, particularly in this time when social media is king, athletes who speak out place themselves at risk of a backlash from their teammates, coaches, and upper management, as well as the communities they entertain with their athletic talent. This may cause frustration and withdrawal from their investment in their team, which may jeopardize playing time, or result in lost scholarships, in the case of college athletes. Although more prevalent in recent years, activism among athletes has been present for decades. We are here to support those who choose activism, as well as those who may not be comfortable with public activism, but still have strong feelings about ongoing events, and struggle with external pressures to either keep quiet or speak out.

As sports psychiatrists, part of our mission is helping both individual athletes and teams perform at their best. By being comfortable with the uncomfortable conversations surrounding race, and providing our expertise to facilitate critical discussions with teams and individuals, we commit to promoting trust, cohesiveness, and a safe space for addressing conflict, so that teams can function together to obtain results. As physicians specializing in psychiatric medicine, we are cognizant of the critical interface between brain and body, and regularly treat patients with mental illness and its sequelae. It is well established that stress can cause adverse health outcomes such as high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity and diabetes. Recent studies, however, have highlighted the way in which facing racism and experiencing discrimination specifically may also harm the health of BIPOC, causing increased risk for chronic disease, faster aging, and shortened life span. It is our duty to address this public health issue in the populations we treat.

**To our Black colleagues in psychiatry worldwide**, encompassing all levels of training and experience, we share your feelings of sadness, exasperation, and indignation surrounding racism and the brutalization of Black people. We will not stand idly by.

**To our non-Black colleagues of all backgrounds**, we implore you to lend your voices and creative energies in solidarity with the Black community at this time. Now is the time not just for

mere words of support, but to be purposefully anti-racist.

**To Black athletes, of all ages and stages of your careers**, we commit to better understanding the complex circumstances under which you are expected to perform. We support your taking the steps you need to manage the array of emotions that stem from these hurtful incidents, and will endeavor to better support you.

As often quoted, though the original source is unknown, “Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are.” We have heard the alarm and we will answer the call.

## **Sports Psychiatrists for Racial and Social Justice**

**Wilsa M.S. Charles Malveaux, MD, MA** - *Western Regional Trustee, Region IV for the Black Psychiatrists of America (BPA); CEO and President of WCM Sports Psych*

**Edgar Agames, MD** - *Past President of the Central American and Caribbean Association of Psychiatry (ACCAP)*

**Evelyn Ashiofu, MD , MPH** - *General Psychiatry Resident*

**Dan Begel, MD** – *Founder, International Society for Sports Psychiatry (ISSP)*

**David Conant-Norville, MD, DLFAPA, DFAACAP** - *Founder and Clinical Director Mind Matters PC*

**Altha Stewart, MD** - *Past President of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), Past President, Black Psychiatrists of America (BPA), Past President, Association of Women Psychiatrists (AWP), and Medical Director, WNBA*

**Derek Suite, MD, MS**- *Founder and CEO of Full Circle Confidential*

**Stephen Taylor, MD, MPH, DFAPA, FASAM** – *Medical Director, NBA/NBPA Player Assistance/Anti-Drug Program*

**Psychiatrists, Other Physicians, Mental Health & Sports Professionals- To Join the Movement Sign Here:**

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