

Black Lives Matter; George Floyd's Life Matters: Statement by the DCP Representative Assembly

We bear witness to the shocking and tragic news of the killing of George Floyd on 25 May 2020 while in police custody in Minneapolis. We mourn George Floyd and we should not forget the others who have died under similar circumstances.

We condemn the racial violence, discrimination and persistent structural racism that underpins society in the strongest terms, and stand with our colleagues and others in speaking out in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

We also recognise that the killing of a black man by law enforcement officers is on a continuum of pervasive inequality and systemic racism. We know that for many people in the UK, including our members and people who use our services, the experience of racism is an everyday occurrence ranging from micro-aggressions to the open demonstrations of abuse and discrimination. The fear of violence can be ever present.

This is not a black problem, but a structural issue built on centuries of racism. It's a problem for us all, which we need to understand and work with to stop these tragic events happening over and over again.

The emotional impact, particularly those who identify as black, will continue to be significant. It may be worsened by the isolation and stress created by the pandemic, cutting people off from some of their usual support systems and reducing the effectiveness of their coping strategies. The grief and the anger may feel overwhelming; we may all feel helpless and hopeless.

Although many of us feel despondent, lessons from history tell us that such feelings, and the courage to confront the 'othering' and 'dehumanisation,' usually precedes meaningful change. We believe that we need to be committed to doing better, and confront racism at individual and organizational levels to meaningfully assert that we are anti-racist.

Collectively, we can try to turn these feelings into a means of powering change.

The DCP remains committed to upholding the values of equality, diversity and inclusion and to continuing to develop our anti-racist stance. We recognise that we have still have considerable work to do in implementing these values and creating lasting change.

In addition, we call on all our members to consider what they can do, individually, together and with us to take a stand and also to help provide the emotional and practical support needed by service users, families and colleagues. This must not be seen as just another task for those people who are marginalised or oppressed due to their race; we all need to step up and help carry the emotional strain as friends, managers, leaders, co-workers.

Those of us in the white majority need to listen to and validate the feelings and experiences of our marginalised colleagues, whilst accepting that it is not their role to educate us.

We may need to act upon what we hear, not be bystanders. It is our task to educate ourselves, both to learn about how racism operates within our society and our profession, and to eradicate the ways we allow racism and whiteness to perpetuate.

We recognise the discomfort and anxiety in this process, which can give rise to, often intolerable, feelings. We need to pay attention to the defences that may then be invoked, recognising that they are particularly damaging and painful for those from minority cultures. The DCP will be sharing resources to support this shortly.

It is now a time to reflect on how we have all, in our small ways contributed to the path we find ourselves on. In the words of James Baldwin:

“Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety.”

The DCP Executive and all the DCP networks will continue to reflect on and develop our responses in the coming weeks, as part of our equality, diversity, inclusion and anti-racism development work and action plans.

A further statement on the work the DCP is already committed to and our plans for the future will be available soon.

With thanks to all our members who have helped in the development of this statement.