



A message from Lucky Jain and Michelle Wallace

At this time of the year, we typically reflect on the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to bring us solace; recent events make them more relevant than ever! Children across the world recite excerpts from Dr. King's 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech. They recite words of hope, hope of children being able to "one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." They recite words that call forth visions of the promise fulfilled by reminding us that "when we allow freedom to ring . . . we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: Free at last. Free at last. Thank God almighty, we are free at last." Motivated by these words, many will engage in acts of service for those less fortunate by making donations to organizations or volunteering. However, the next day we return to our regular lives and continue to bear witness to the discrepancies that exist.

The past year highlighted preexisting divisions, discrepancies, and disparities in our country. As we watched the murder of George Floyd and learned of the murder of Breonna Taylor and countless others, we were confronted with the vulnerability of some communities at the hands of those sworn to protect us. In the medical community, the pandemic has highlighted disparities in health care evidenced most profoundly by the Black and Brown communities disproportionately infected with COVID-19 and its sequelae. The pandemic has also revealed the many faces of bigotry as experienced by our Asian-American brothers and sisters. Further, it has exposed differences in gender expectations as the careers of many women stalled in the face of virtual schooling and work. This past week has been no exception, as we witnessed an insurrection and discrepancies in the way those who violently took over the Capitol were handled in comparison to peaceful protestors outside of the White House months earlier.

This year let us remember that Dr. King's work was not accomplished in one day and his legacy cannot fully be honored in 24 hours. Let us remember that Dr. King volunteered not just for a day but actively advocated for years for civil rights and economic and racial justice. To fully honor him, let us give serious thought to the following questions:

1. Where do I see injustice, discrepancies, and disparities in my environment?
2. How can I be an advocate for justice, change, and equity?

In answering these questions, let us be reminded that advocacy does not have to be a grand gesture. We often associate advocacy with fighting for legislative change. However, we can be everyday advocates. We are everyday advocates when we are sitting in meetings and recognize those that do not have a seat at the table or feel welcome to speak up. We are everyday advocates when we

remember that health is impacted by disease, environment, and access to resources and we connect our patients with resources. We are everyday advocates when we make phone calls to transportation companies on our patient's behalf or write a letter to an insurance company or school. We are everyday advocates when we see or hear acts of bigotry and become upstanders. These are all important gestures that can have a grand impact.

Upon finding answers to these questions, let us also remind ourselves of the "fierce urgency of now" as Dr. King also mentioned in his iconic speech. Let us not wait for change to eventually come but find ways to engage right away and with regularity. For it is in this manner that we will come closer to living out the dream.