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Diversity and Inclusion 'Are Core Values' in Code of Conduct; Hotline Calls Rise

By Nina Youngstrom

After the May death of George Floyd and the protests that followed, the leadership of Baptist Memorial Health Care Corp. took stock of some things around race and inclusion. For one thing, Baptist Memorial is based in Memphis, which is nearly 70% people of color,^[1] but its senior leadership is mostly white. “I’m the only African American senior vice president of the organization out of 14,” said Greg Duckett, senior vice president and chief legal officer. “What can we do to change the realities of the workplace?” And how can the health system show employees and the community that it has the intent to provide equality of opportunity and equity of leadership?

Those are two of the challenges that Baptist Memorial’s new Diversity and Respect Council is taking on. It has developed a training program called “Dismantling Racism by Building a Culture of Respect,” which includes an opening video from the CEO. All employees were required to complete the training by July 31 and sign an acknowledgment.

The training centers on respect for every person, Duckett explained. “We shared that in order to dismantle racism and discrimination, our team members will listen without judgment and think before [they] speak and write.” They will be inclusive of others and report discrimination immediately. “We have behaviors that are known as ‘always behaviors.’” Among them: employees will embrace diversity, treat people fairly, be open and civil, respect the culture, address conflict proactively and civilly, and collaborate with each other. “We explained why respect is so important,” Duckett said. “It holds people responsible for their actions, reduces workplace stress, creates a healthier environment and promotes equity in the workplace. Respect can’t exist in a culture that tolerates discrimination, harassment and injustice.”

Compliance is part of the process. It will “ensure we are doing what we are supposed to be doing,” Duckett said. If not, people are encouraged to report to compliance—anonously if necessary—without fear of retaliation. That’s the first part of the journey for Baptist Memorial. Part two will be hiring a coach to help the health system develop a program to address the disparity in demographics between the community and leadership. “There has to be an intentionality if you want to move the needle,” said Duckett, who noted that Baptist Memorial also has hospitals and clinics in Mississippi and Arkansas.

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