

## FROM THE EDITOR

## The Call for Reform

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*“May I never see in the patient anything but a fellow creature in pain...”*

—Moses Maimonides (1135-1204)

*“Wherever the art of Medicine is loved, there is also a love of Humanity.”*

—Hippocrates (460 BC-370 BC)

**F**erguson, Missouri—Riots break out after a St. Louis County grand jury declines to indict Officer Darren Wilson in the fatal shooting of Michael Brown.

Cleveland, Ohio—Ricky Jackson and Wiley Bridgeman exonerated of murder and leave prison after more than 39 years behind bars.

New York, NY—Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance Jr. pledges \$35 million for testing of up to 70,000 rape kits nationally—will identify some, exonerate others.

When we look back on 2014, many of us will remember it as a time of unrest. The year-end focus on disparities in the criminal justice system have had a profound impact on us all. Across the country, people have taken to the streets to demand accountability and change. Our cities, universities and even medical schools have conducted “die-ins” and the words “I can’t breathe” have taken on new meaning. At *Forum*, we have joined the call.

It has been seven months since the SGIM national meeting. I met Elizabeth (Elissa) Poorman at that meeting and through her poster presentation learned of the (Medicare) Inmate Exception.<sup>1</sup> Shortly thereafter, Tanu Pandey submitted her article on unjust imprisonment (*Essay, Part 1*). I

knew that we were on to something and that the story had to be told. I did not know how timely this issue of *Forum* would be in those early days of planning.

In this issue we address the plight of a vulnerable population some have forgotten. Articles on wrongful conviction, the high prevalence of mental health issues and barriers to addiction services for justice-affected persons demonstrate the depth of problems faced by these patients. Women are an especially important group, as their experiences within the criminal justice system impact not only their lives but the lives of their children and grandchildren as well. The articles on *Transitions of Care* by Hermione Hurley and *Operationalizing a Human Rights Agenda* by Ross MacDonald suggest a framework for interventions that target the root causes of re-incarceration. The values of a just society mandate such programs, as they have the potential to save lives.

This is a time when each of us is compelled to face his/her implicit bias<sup>2</sup> and ask what kind of nation we have become and what kind of nation we want to be. As GIM physicians, we should discuss these issues with our children, our patients, and our trainees. We should include these

topics in our medical curricula and strive to improve healthcare systems to serve these needs.

Primary care physicians may encounter justice-affected persons at many different points in their interactions with the correctional system. We have taken an oath to serve the individual patient, regardless of circumstance. Justice in the care of these patients mandates that we address these issues with purpose, intellect and action.

As you read this issue in the new year, it is my hope that you will speak out in some way. May this issue on correctional healthcare be a starting point for collaboration, education, and reform. May we find courage this year to advocate for the weak, forgive the penitent, and change what is unjust in the communities we serve.

I wish to thank Associate Editor Tanu Pandey for her dedication and hard work in leading this issue of *Forum*.

### References

1. Poorman E. The inmate exception. *SGIM Forum* 2014; 37(9):12.
2. <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>