Journal of Gastrointestinal Surgery: Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion in the Editorial Process

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Diversity is a core value of the *Journal of Gastrointestinal Surgery*. Unfortunately, editorial boards and the peer review process have traditionally largely involved White men. While over the last 20 years, the overall proportion of women on editorial boards has increased from 5 to 19%, this relative proportion remains woefully low.¹ Furthermore, the number of under-represented minorities on editorial boards has similarly been inadequate and not reflective of the need for diversity and different perspectives. By inviting people with different experiences and perspectives to the editorial and peer review process, journals can eliminate or at least minimize blind spots and mitigate implicit bias. While homogenous editorial teams can slide into “groupthink,” failing to consider different perspectives, a diverse team fosters engagement and innovation and ensures a wide range of views are considered. Diversity is also good for science. Diverse perspectives often are associated with diverse research foci and the generation of new findings.² As noted in a recent *Nature* editorial, a more representative workforce is more likely to pursue questions and problems that go beyond the narrow slice of humanity that much of science has traditionally been set up to serve.³ The presence of diverse perspectives (including gender and ethnic diversity) in collective problem-solving in business and other organizations has also been demonstrated to lead to more innovative solutions. As sociologist Scott Page noted in his book, *The Diversity Bonus*, groups that represent cognitive diversity have important benefits related to how they reason, interpret, and solve problems. In essence, different ways of thinking, which can be affected by identification with

a particular group (gender, race, socioeconomic status, to name a few), produces something extra—a bonus.⁴

While the challenge of diversity has been long-standing, the recent publication of the article entitled, “Prevalence of unprofessional social media content among young vascular surgeons” by Hardouin et al. in the *Journal of Vascular Surgery* raised many issues and drew renewed attention to the importance and urgency for diversity in the publishing process.⁵ To that end, Dr. Melina Kibbe and Dr. Julie Freischlag, the current and former Editors in Chief of *JAMA Surgery*, announced a call to action for all surgery journal editors.⁶ Specifically, the pledge calls for a commitment to diversity and inclusion throughout the editorial and peer review process. In addition, the pledge asks journals to commit to improving diversity among the editorial leadership and editorial board of the journal and when inviting authors to write commentaries for the journal. The *Journal of Gastrointestinal Surgery* wholeheartedly supports and endorses this pledge. Among the 215 journals invited to join this pledge, we are proud to be among the 117 who have “signed on” (<https://www.facs.org/member-services/sjeg>).

Over the last several years, the *Journal of Gastrointestinal Surgery* has moved purposefully toward being more inclusive and diverse. A journal that traditionally had two male co-editors, we expanded the editorial ranks to include four associate editors—two of whom are women. In addition, we have intentionally moved toward adding more women to the editorial board with the edition of seven new female members over the last 2 years. We have also initiated term limits to editorial board membership (4-year terms, renewable once based on merit for a total of 8 years maximum) in order to allow for new members to join. As Beeler and colleagues noted, term limits in academic medicine help to “unclog” the pipeline.⁷ Pipeline development and planned succession/term limits are critical to provide opportunities to all (diverse) potential leaders with the desire to serve. Furthermore, in working with the Society for Surgery of the Alimentary Tract (SSAT), we have specifically identified more women and under-represented minority SSAT members to act as reviewers for

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the *Journal of Gastrointestinal Surgery*. In turn, this initiative will facilitate more engagement of diverse individuals with the journal, as well as help these individuals establish a track record as reviewers, which in turn will lead to future Editorial Board membership consideration. In addition, we have invited a diverse group of authors to participate in our newly launched expert review series. We also welcome self-nominations from traditionally under-represented surgeons who would like to serve as reviewers, or be considered for editorial board membership.

We readily acknowledge that we still have a very long way to go. The field of surgery, and specific sub-specialties such as hepato-pancreato-biliary surgery in particular, still suffers from a lack of diversity. We at the *Journal of Gastrointestinal Surgery* have work to do. As a signatory of the “diversity pledge,” we commit to having diversity and inclusion as core guiding principles as we strive to achieve our collective goal of diverse representation and participation in academic surgery.

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