



The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Words matter. Words matter a lot.

Over the course of this past week, we have watched as our city, state and country have become torn apart by events driven by hate and a failure of leadership. We all stare at the media frenzy over of each new instance of racial injustice, hatred and bigotry. It is easy to become numb to the seemingly gratuitous endorsements claiming to be one with those who are marginalized and voiceless. Yet, in the midst of one of America's greatest crises, we once again see a far too familiar story being played out –innocent people are trampled by those in power, without a voice, and unable to breathe.

My favorite American holidays celebrate freedom: Independence Day (July 4th), Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, Martin Luther King Day. Each of these holidays brings us together as Americans to celebrate our collective progress and remind us of the struggles we have overcome to become a great nation. As an immigrant to these United States, I take particular pride in learning about the adversity this nation has faced, and while far from perfect, has risen to meet. Sadly, we are reliving some of this history which reminds us of our unfinished work.

It is unfortunate that many of us are not able to reach our full potential due to external barriers. Race, gender, sexual orientation, body type, perspective, religion or skin color should not define our potential, but rather should punctuate our individuality as Americans. These characteristics may give some insight into who we are, but rarely define what we can contribute to our nation, our culture and the dental profession. We have come together at the School of Dentistry to take care of people through the study of the art and science of dentistry. Diversity of race, gender, sexual orientation, body type, perspective, religion or skin color makes us stronger.

I started out my message by stating that words matter. My words matter. As dean of the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Dentistry, I affirm the shared values of our University: The celebration of our unique individuality and the intrinsic value that each of us bring to the table. I have little tolerance for bigotry, hatred, and bullying. For those who espouse these ideas, I realize I cannot reach you unless you want to learn. Until you do, you are not welcome in our profession. For those who are the target of hate, know that you will be supported by my administration and will be welcomed by others in the dental profession. Please also remember that I and others may not always see your struggles and we need you to speak up. For my part, I promise to redouble my efforts to recognize your pain, understand your situation, and share in your experiences. Silence does not mean a lack of support, it is needed to make thoughtful progress which we can only start when we are willing to hear each other. It is time to start a dialogue – words do matter.

Dr. Russ Taichman
Dean
UAB School of Dentistry
The University of Alabama at Birmingham