

THE SHOCK OF CHARLOTTESVILLE:
UNMASKING RACISM IN HEALTHCARE

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As I write, America is on edge following a violent confrontation in Charlottesville, Virginia on 12 August between white supremacists and Nazi supporters on one side and counter-protestors on the other. The proximate cause of this mayhem was a disagreement about whether a public statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee should be removed. Banners of Nazi swastikas, Confederate flags, and KKK symbols were carried by torch-toting protestors in common cause. Shouts such as “white lives matter” and “Jews will not replace us” erupted from the protestors.¹ Self-appointed civilian “peacekeepers” in combat gear bearing semi-automatic rifles and handguns lent support to the Nazi sympathizers and white supremacists. Richard Spencer, the well-known white supremacist, was a planner of the Charlottesville “rally.” David Duke, former imperial wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, marched with the protesting white supremacists. “We’re going to fulfill the promises of Donald Trump ... to take our country back,” said Mr. Duke.²

Heather D. Heyer, 32, was killed when a white supremacist rammed his car into a group of counter-protestors. Two Virginia state policemen, Lt. Jay Cullen and Trooper-Pilot Berke Bates, were killed when their surveillance helicopter slammed into nearby woods hours after the car crash. Nineteen others were injured.

Two days later, following an earlier brief statement condemning racial intolerance and bigotry, President Donald Trump gave a rambling press conference in which he said, “I think there is blame on both sides.” He added: “You had a group on one side that was bad and you had a group on the other side that was also very violent.” Even so, he claimed there were “fine people” on both sides. Mr. Trump implied there was a moral equivalence between the opposing groups. He emphasized repeatedly that he, unlike the reporters, knew the “facts” and that the journalists covering the event were peddling fake news. He refused to condemn or even acknowledge the horrors of Nazism during World War II, during which nearly 300,000 American soldiers were killed and in which approximately six million Jews, Gypsies, the mentally ill, and homosexuals were murdered. It was as if, in his version of history, these events never took place. “You are changing history, you are changing culture” by taking down statues of past leaders, Mr. Trump said. He was apparently clueless that *he* was changing history by ignoring the hate-laced Nazi record.³

It didn’t seem to matter to many Americans. A Washington Post-ABC News poll 16-20 August found that 22 million Americans think white supremacy and neo-Nazism are acceptable.^{4, 5}

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