

Episode: *Author Interview: “How Should Health Professions Educators and Organizations Desegregate Teaching and Learning Environments?”*

Guest: Aisha James, MD, MEd

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript by: Cheryl Green

[Access the podcast.](#)

[bright theme music]

TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the *Author Interview series* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I'm your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Aisha James, an adult and pediatric primary care physician at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. She's here to discuss her article, coauthored with Dr Katrina A. Armstrong: “*How Should Health Professions Educators and Organizations Desegregate Teaching and Learning Environments?*,” in the January 2023 issue of the Journal, [Segregation in Health Care](#). Dr James, thank you so much for being on the podcast. [music fades out]

DR AISHA JAMES: Thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited to be here.

HOFF: To start with, what's the main ethics point that you and Dr Armstrong are making in this article?

JAMES: So, the main ethics point is that segregation in health care is ubiquitous. And since we know that separate really cannot be equal, we as health care professionals and learners and institutions need to take deliberate steps to desegregate care in order for us to ultimately achieve health equity.

HOFF: And so, what's the most important thing for health professions students and trainees to take from your article?

JAMES: So, I think the takeaways are one, that segregation is occurring in health care at many different levels. So, patients within the same city may be seeking care at different hospital institutions along racial lines. Even within the same institution, we know that patients of color are often seen in different clinical spaces, often at trainee clinics, or are less likely to be seen in subspecialty care. Even if they are being seen in the same clinics or on the same unit, we also know that patients of color are being seen by different providers, and so that they're more likely to be seen by students or people early in their training and less likely to be board certified. And then lastly, we know that segregation even happens at the treatment level. And so, there's good evidence to show that patients of color are less likely to receive the standard of care or best treatments for many conditions.

And so, second, the reasons for these various forms of segregation are multifactorial. And so, they can include the location of institutions, learning institutions, facilities; the insurance types that are accepted and prioritized by health care facilities; referral networks; access to services such as interpreter services; the diversity of staff; as well as a patient's overall sense of being welcome and feeling safe at an institution.

And so, last, due to the complex nature of segregation in health care, it really does require robust programming and resources to dismantle it. And importantly, we really need to involve patients and community organizations at all steps of that process.

HOFF: And finally, if you could add a point to your article that you didn't have the time or space to fully explore, what would that be?

JAMES: So, in this piece, we really wanted to emphasize that a lot of important change can happen at a local level and provide some guidance on how to make this happen. But we do know that there remains barriers to desegregate care and desegregate health education that lie outside of local institutions. And so, that really is going to require changes to national policies and compensation models. And so, we want to encourage students, physicians, and institutions to advocate for these policy and regulatory changes. [theme music returns]

HOFF: Dr James, thank you so much for your time on the podcast today, and thanks to you and your coauthor for your contribution to the Journal this month.

JAMES: Thanks so much for having me.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, JournalofEthics.org. We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.