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## Introduction

Studies in healthcare consistently show that not only does diversity improve patient outcomes and satisfaction but it improves financial performance as well.<sup>1-2</sup> However, despite the known importance of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in healthcare, two major events have changed the way our Otolaryngology department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) are able to discuss these important topics.

On February 23, 2023, the Board of Governors overseeing UNC amended the policy called “political activities of employees” and prohibited “compelled speech in hiring, admission, promotion, or tenure.” By doing so, they noted that no university representative can “solicit or require an applicant or faculty member to attest to beliefs about political debate or social action.”<sup>3</sup>

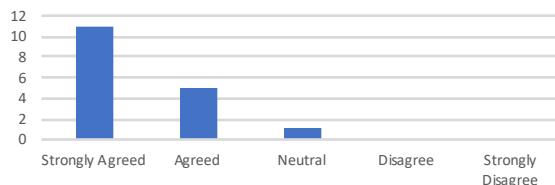
Similar on June 29, 2023, the US Supreme Court decided against UNC and Harvard University and ruled that universities can no longer take race into consideration during the admissions process thus ending affirmative action.

Since then, our medical school faculty have been trying to meet these new requirements, while balancing the importance of DEI to our learners, patients, and research including trying to fulfill DEI requirements for NIH grant funding.

We had previously started a faculty-led DEI journal club where we discuss the current literature related to DEI within medical education and healthcare. This study’s objective was to evaluate the journal club participants’ awareness of DEI issues and if participating in the journal club affected the way they incorporated these topics into their daily workplace activities. As DEI is no longer a factor in promotion or admission process, the involvement of faculty and trainees is purely voluntary.

## Methods and Materials

Journal clubs were held semi-annually by our department in the evenings. Articles were selected and presented by faculty who volunteered. 3-4 articles were discussed at each event. After attending the journal club, an internet-based survey using SurveyMonkey was sent anonymously to participants to fill out. This study was found to be IRB-exempt.

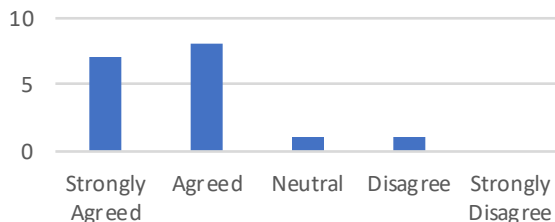


**Figure 1.** Responses to “the journal club increased my awareness of DEI issues in the workplace.”

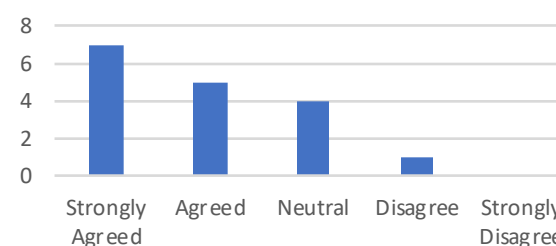
## Results

Results were collected after 2 journal club events (September 2022 and May 2023). A total of 50 people were invited to the events: 22 attendings (excluding those conducting this study), 22 residents and 6 fellows. 50% of invitees attended. 17 of 25 different attendees (68%) responded to the survey. Most were faculty, with 4 residents and 2 fellows responding. 10 males, 7 females and 0 nonbinary individuals responded with 7 identifying as a member of an underrepresented group in medicine (URiM) which we defined as a member of an ethnic, racial, gender identity, sexual orientation or religious group that is considered underrepresented in medicine.

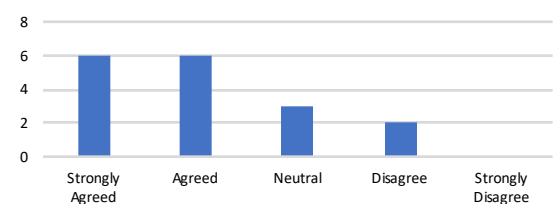
The majority (94%) felt that the journal club increased their awareness of DEI issues in the workplace (Figure 1), and 88% felt that attending changed the way they think about these issues in the workplace (Figure 2). 71% felt that the journal club led to projects that increased DEI in the workplace (Figure 3) with 70% responding that it changed the way they interacted with coworkers (Figure 4). Only 66% felt that it changed the way they take care of patients (Figure 5).



**Figure 2.** Responses to “the journal club has changed the way I think about DEI issues in the workplace.”



**Figure 3.** Responses to “the journal club increased DEI projects in the workplace.”



**Figure 4.** Responses to “the journal club has changed the way I interact with coworkers.”

## Discussion

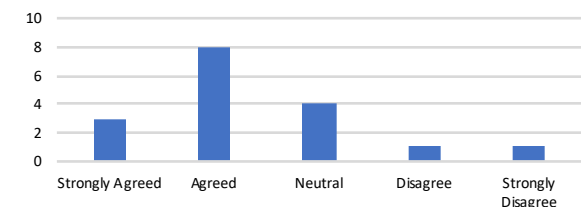
Our department started a voluntary DEI journal club. We found that participants felt that the journal club increased their awareness of DEI topics. There was also many other positive changes including increased DEI projects in the department, better interactions with coworkers as well as some changes in patient care.

It is our opinion that the understanding of DEI in healthcare is pivotal to the success of our field of Otolaryngology. Other articles have also discussed and agreed that DEI is an important factor in the growth of Otolaryngology.<sup>2,4-5</sup> While there have been positive increases in Otolaryngology over the last few years with increases in many different URiM groups, data still shows that women and Black trainees remain underrepresented.<sup>6</sup> There is a growing concern that the recent decision to eliminate affirmative action may reduce these positive trends.<sup>7</sup>

The recent policies of eliminating affirmative action and the ban of compelled speech at our institution have forced us to rethink how we are able to continue our commitment to promoting diversity while complying to university policies. Thus, it has been vital to continue to have discussions about DEI topics within our department even as they remain completely voluntary. Despite being voluntary and the recent concern about voicing an opinion about the importance of diversity in health care, our study found that most faculty members appreciated this additional method of awareness of these issue.

To our knowledge, this is the first study to look at the positive effect of a DEI journal club in Otolaryngology. One radiation oncology residency did start a DEI journal club which is the only other one reported in the literature to date.<sup>8</sup>

There are several limitations to this study including a small sample size as well as a potential selection bias of those who responded. However, 50% of invitees did attend an evening journal club and over 50% responded to the survey which is high for a voluntary after-work event. These are subjective data points so there is also a potential for recall biases. Despite these limitations, the journal club did seem to change both participants’ thoughts and actions on DEI issues in the healthcare workplace.



**Figure 5.** Responses to “the journal club changed the way I give patient care.”

## Conclusions

We found that a faculty-lead journal club increased awareness of DEI topics, and subjectively led to an increase in DEI projects as well as better workplace interactions. These type of interaction, ie journal article discussions and other publications on DEI issue, may be needed to confront what has become a banned topic of overt discussion.

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