

Tim Talk

[Episode 18: Common pursuit of racial, social, and medical justice](#)

00:20:09

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Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 3

In this episode of Tim Talk, Tim chats with the Co chair of University of Maine, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Council.

00:00:10 Tim Dentry

Thank you for joining us for Tim talk.

00:00:12 Tim Dentry

I'm Tim Dentry, President and CEO of Northern Light Health.

00:00:16 Tim Dentry

Through this podcast, we hope to break down barriers, embrace diversity, and focus on issues of racial, social, and medical justice.

00:00:26 Tim Dentry

We want to listen and learn by tapping into the many voices of diversity that we have across our health system and our great state of Maine.

00:00:35 Tim Dentry

This podcast provides a forum for our listeners to share an experience of growth toward a culture that cares for one another.

00:00:43 Tim Dentry

Our goal is to create a shared understanding of the issues that exist.

00:00:47 Tim Dentry

And find a better path forward.

00:00:50 Tim Dentry

Our guest today is Doctor Kimberly D.

00:00:52 Tim Dentry

Whitehead.

00:00:53 Tim Dentry

Doctor Whitehead is vice president and chief of staff at the University of Maine, the state's flagship public research University at Humane Doctor Whitehead is engaged in a variety of strategic initiatives, including Co. Chairing the President's Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, leading UMaine's initiative.

00:01:16 Tim Dentry

And serving is the project director for the recently announced UMS Transform Project.

00:01:22 Tim Dentry

Doctor Whitehead, thank you for joining me today.

00:01:26 Kimberly Whitehead

Thank you for having me Tim.

00:01:27 Kimberly Whitehead

I'm really honored to be here.

00:01:29 Tim Dentry

Last week when we spoke, we ended on a first name basis, so please call me Tim Ann.

00:01:34 Tim Dentry

May I continue to call you Kimberly wonderful thank you.

00:01:36 Kimberly Whitehead

Absolutely you can.

00:01:38

Yeah.

00:01:40 Tim Dentry

When we had our get to know each other called last week, you described the amazing and thorough work done by UMaine, including your diversity equity, inclusion count.

00:01:51 Tim Dentry

So the nine areas of advocacy and the many recommendations for action that came out of this initiative, including your annual report and thank you for sending me all that material.

00:02:02 Tim Dentry

I've read it.

00:02:03 Tim Dentry

We're going to share it with Rdy Council here and see what we can borrow.

00:02:08 Tim Dentry

We at Northern Light are on a similar journey, and I know we can learn a lot from the Humane experi.

00:02:14 Tim Dentry

Prince, would you please share an overarching perspective of the work that Humane is undertaking right now?

00:02:21 Kimberly Whitehead

Sure, thank you for that question. I want to talk a little bit about the President's Council on Diversity, Equity, Equity and Inclusion, which is a group of 33 allies, advocates, champions from the University of Maine in our regional campus. the University of Maine at Messiah.

00:02:40 Kimberly Whitehead

Yes, and so back in the summer the President appointed this Council to look at four areas.

00:02:50 Kimberly Whitehead

We have a four point charge.

00:02:52 Kimberly Whitehead

The first part is to look at structural impediments to diversity, equity and inclusion.

00:02:57 Kimberly Whitehead

So what are the areas of systemic racism and?

00:03:01 Kimberly Whitehead

Other structural impedit.

00:03:02 Kimberly Whitehead

It's 2D I at you may an you may Matias our second part of our charge was to look at visions and operations integration. So what are the major University planning documents and processes including our strategic visions and values framework are defined tomorrow initiatives? Are they sufficiently focused on the values of diversity, equity and inclusion?

00:03:26 Kimberly Whitehead

Also, looking at data and measurement, what data should the University be collecting and reviewing to guide our work and Lastly alignment in resourced is our current portfolio of committees, offices, organizations and activities designed to promote diversity, equity and inclusion so.

00:03:47 Kimberly Whitehead

You see, it was a huge charge for us and so.

00:03:52 Kimberly Whitehead

We decided as a committee to tackle a part of that charge and we focused on structural impediments alongside that.

00:04:00 Kimberly Whitehead

We're also looking at the data and measurement piece, and I want to talk a little bit first about the areas of advocacy, so we settled on 9 areas of advocacy for our work that came from a previous report that was.

00:04:10 Kimberly Whitehead

Awesome.

00:04:15 Kimberly Whitehead

Generated at the institution by my colleague, Doctor Robert Dana, on diversity and inclusion at Humane, and he focused on 8 areas there, and so we decided to add 1 and so our areas are race ethnicity.

00:04:29 Kimberly Whitehead

Religion, age ability, national origin, gender, sexual orientation and socio economic status.

00:04:38

Yes.

00:04:39 Kimberly Whitehead

And so I will just say from a very personal perspective that this has been a great opportunity for me to collaborate with some very talented.

00:04:49 Kimberly Whitehead

Faculty, staff, students, alumni and community partners who are commit.

00:04:56 Kimberly Whitehead

Did two diversity equity and inclusion at both Humana Human Matias and who have worked diligently to provide or generate this report that you were able to read our findings or recommendations as a part of that, we had 45 recommendations that focused on structural impediments, and we released that report on January 18th.

00:05:18 Kimberly Whitehead

And so this is just an initial phase of our work because we have a lot more work to do, but we're very pleased with the product that we were able to generate in just three short months.

00:05:29 Kimberly Whitehead

Of focused collaborative meetings utilizing the diversity of thought perspective experiences that the members of the committee were able to bring to the conversation, and so I just want to add that the other piece of our work and I want to kind of just mention our coach here.

00:05:51 Kimberly Whitehead

Is Doctor Susan McKay, who is a founding director of The Maine Center for Research and Stem Education and Professor of Physics.

00:05:58 Kimberly Whitehead

So she brings a wealth of knowledge.

00:06:00 Kimberly Whitehead

Knowledge and experience to to this collaboration and so we have been kind of pitching our report and socializing it among different campus leaders at Humana.

00:06:10 Kimberly Whitehead

You may Matias and it has been well received and we've received a lot of report and we look forward to the implementation of those recommendations that are included.

00:06:22 Tim Dentry

That is fabulous and I really love the connection that you have with values. I think that's one thing that I've really learned from listening to you and reading the the content. And I'm going to talk with RDI Counsel as well. I think connecting it with values and that's really important. Plus the measurements.

00:06:42 Tim Dentry

And resourcing, you're so right, you know everyone.

00:06:45 Tim Dentry

You know that we've worked with here at Northern Light that is part of this whole.

00:06:51 Tim Dentry

Effort this whole initiative is very well meaning, and we're learning and we're growing and we have a lot of doers as well.

00:06:59 Tim Dentry

But how do you make sure we resource that so it's not just a one off, but it's it's who we are and what we do and we back up our words with actual.

00:07:11 Tim Dentry

Steps and tangible actions.

00:07:13 Tim Dentry

So I think that's something we can learn from your effort, for sure.

00:07:18 Tim Dentry

I know that DE diversity, equity and inclusion has become a commonplace term, an acronym, but I do sometimes worry that the passion, depth and higher calling that started this initiative, not just here in northern light but across our country might become making up this term. But corporately normalized.

00:07:41 Tim Dentry

And by that I mean it will become the area of focus of a committee with an annual work plan and then we mailloux ourselves into thinking that it's just another initiative or we've done it all, which of course we're only just beginning this journey.

00:07:56 Tim Dentry

So when I first started as CEO of Northern Light that I've been in this position.

00:08:01 Tim Dentry

I decided to make this a key part of our pursuit of a culture of caring for one another and what motivated me the most at that time and still does, frankly, is racial.

00:08:14 Tim Dentry

Social and medical justice.

00:08:18 Tim Dentry

And when you and I spoke last week, we talked about the integration of those three aspects of justice.

00:08:25 Tim Dentry

It started here again.

00:08:27 Tim Dentry

It was only in my second month or so and we were in the pandemic was was obviously just like it is today.

00:08:34 Tim Dentry

Here in February 2021 it was, you know, big deal and all consuming. But then the George Floyd killing happened and we realized we have to be more than just focus on putting out a virus.

00:08:49 Tim Dentry

We've got to make sure that that if we're saying we care about our staff that we find out are there things that we need to learn from our colleagues or 12,500 colleagues that terrable incident that terrable killing can help us learn. So thus the racial part of it was right out front when we started.

00:09:11 Tim Dentry

US and then we also surveyed all of our staff.

00:09:15 Tim Dentry

It was a great survey that our human resource leaders across northern light put out there for all of our staff.

00:09:22 Tim Dentry

An one thing that came back was also very much a concern for.

00:09:27 Tim Dentry

Just as you name the nine areas of advocacy.

00:09:32 Tim Dentry

There are other groups that need that wanted to be listened to that felt that they are invisible that felt.

00:09:39 Tim Dentry

Hurt through microaggressions or what have you.

00:09:42 Tim Dentry

The LGBTQ plus community, ET cetera.

00:09:45 Tim Dentry

So thus social justice and then of course, with Kovid bringing on what it brought the acknowledgement as we started to see trends and the data started to come in and realize wait a minute.

00:09:59 Tim Dentry

Why is it that?

00:10:00 Tim Dentry

People of color have double or triple the incidence of infection rates and death rates, and that kind of a thing.

00:10:08 Tim Dentry

And then as we get into vaccines, how are we going to make sure that that is something that is equitably X?

00:10:14 Tim Dentry

Possible to two individuals of high risk people of color, and so the medical disparities and we're already beginning to plan for life after covid where?

00:10:25 Tim Dentry

What are the kinds of things as social determinants of health where we could be a more responsive healthcare system and reach out better to individuals?

00:10:35 Tim Dentry

Of all walks of life, especially if we had more of a sensitivity to where there are medical injustices going on.

00:10:43 Tim Dentry

So in other words, they're all connected.

00:10:47 Tim Dentry

That's a big windup and the pitch of my question, but how would you describe the Humane experience of integrating those three pillars of justice?

00:10:59 Kimberly Whitehead

Well, actually I'm going to kind of answer that question from a broader experience or a broader perspective than the Humane perspective, and I think Kovit is a very good example of looking at that as you mentioned, because this pandemic has actually forced us to look at those three pillars and their interconnectedness.

00:11:19 Kimberly Whitehead

Especially if we want to achieve parity.

00:11:21 Kimberly Whitehead

So let's say for example when we talk about vaccine distributions, we look at how the racial background health status in our quest for social justice and equity come into play.

00:11:33 Kimberly Whitehead

In terms of that distribution, I've been watching the news as as we discussed last week, an what I'm seeing is.

00:11:40 Kimberly Whitehead

But even in those communities that are largely composed of people of color, the distribution or the percentage of people who are actually able to get the vaccine is very low.

00:11:52 Kimberly Whitehead

So we have to take all of those things into context to make sure that we are able to provide equity.

00:12:00 Kimberly Whitehead

In pair.

00:12:00 Kimberly Whitehead

Pretty, and that we treat the human condition by keeping those three peerless at the forefront of our minds, right?

00:12:08 Kimberly Whitehead

And I'll just kind of give a personal example of what I'm kind of saying, so I'm an African American.

00:12:15 Kimberly Whitehead

I'm also a woman, but I'm also an individual that suffers from a chronic.

00:12:21 Kimberly Whitehead

Chronic illnesses, right?

00:12:22 Kimberly Whitehead

So if you just take into account one portion of who I am just a female part, then you kind of miss the the taking a deeper dive.

00:12:31 Kimberly Whitehead

I'm African American, but I also have a compromise health.

00:12:34 Kimberly Whitehead

That is, and so if you look at those things interconnected, Lee, the treat, or the parity, or the equity that I'm receiving may be very different.

00:12:37 Kimberly Whitehead

Man.

00:12:43 Kimberly Whitehead

If you only take one part of who I am into into that context.

00:12:47 Kimberly Whitehead

So if you only look at me being a woman or being an African American woman, or not even considering my health status, so I think looking at the interconnectedness.

00:12:55 Kimberly Whitehead

Of health status that medical justice part the socioeconomic status that social justice part.

00:13:02 Kimberly Whitehead

As well as looking at racial justice, those all of those parts are important, and so I like.

00:13:10 Kimberly Whitehead

I said last week, I applaud you for not just looking at one facet of justice, but bringing those three important facets together in the work that you're doing here at Northern Light.

00:13:20 Tim Dentry

That's a beautiful example that I think all of our listeners can really.

00:13:25 Tim Dentry

Identify with the way that you you put that in personal terms.

00:13:28 Tim Dentry

I thank you so much for that Kimberly.

00:13:30 Tim Dentry

I'd like to return the favor.

00:13:32 Tim Dentry

Do you have a question for me?

00:13:33 Kimberly Whitehead

I sure do so as I was thinking about the podcast and the work that you.

00:13:39 Kimberly Whitehead

Doing my question is what is the most valuable lesson that you have learned from hosting this podcast?

00:13:46 Tim Dentry

You know that's a great question, and to our listening audience I will admit I had some time to think about this.

00:13:53 Tim Dentry

'cause I saw the question at a time so I really appreciate that.

00:13:56 Tim Dentry

And I thought a lot about this an what a great question.

00:14:01 Tim Dentry

I have a two fold answer.

00:14:04 Tim Dentry

One is me personally, so what's you know, my most personal valuable lesson.

00:14:10 Tim Dentry

It really is that the you know the power of learning and growing is I, I think at least 10 times greater, probably 100 times greater than through listening than talking. I'll say it again, the power of learning and growing is 10 times greater through listening than through talking.

00:14:31 Tim Dentry

So that's number one.

00:14:33 Tim Dentry

It's that that's kind of the way that I'm built.

00:14:39 Tim Dentry

But through this process.

00:14:41 Tim Dentry

Wow, I haven't learned one thing from what I said, but I've learned a lot from this is you are the 18th individual that's been here with us and I'm very, very proud of that.

00:14:53 Tim Dentry

Not even reached my first year as CEO of Northern Light Health and starting this in, you know, month two or so.

00:15:01 Tim Dentry

And to be able to learn from so many great people and listen is very humbling.

00:15:07 Tim Dentry

So that's number one.

00:15:08 Tim Dentry

It's better to listen than to talk.

00:15:10 Tim Dentry

The second point is that you know my primary target audience is the northern light family.

00:15:18 Tim Dentry

And I consider the northern light family, our 12,500 staff and their families. So that's a lot of people, and the feedback the most valuable lessons. What you asked me? The feedback that I've gotten from the northern light family also has been very enriching and I.

00:15:37 Tim Dentry

Feel that a lot of people have had the opportunity.

00:15:41 Tim Dentry

They said, you know, it's tough to feel invisible and they feel less invisible or.

00:15:48 Tim Dentry

This really is a culture in this organization that cares.

00:15:53 Tim Dentry

I was just with a group from one of our hospitals and they were the leadership group of one of our hospitals that's been hit hard by covid over the last couple of months.

00:16:03 Tim Dentry

So again, this is February.

00:16:06 Tim Dentry

We started our climb.

00:16:08 Tim Dentry

Of real covid infections in our facilities and among our staff and those kinds of things not even two months ago, about two months ago and the prior eight or nine months, was getting ready, getting ready, getting ready.

00:16:23 Tim Dentry

And so they're coming up on the one year anniversary of this.

00:16:27 Tim Dentry

And people are feeling it.

00:16:29 Tim Dentry

They're feeling what that is, you know, the emotions of that and the drain of that, and the stress of that.

00:16:36 Tim Dentry

I asked them as I was listening to their experiences and what they're dealing with and how they're trying to help people and how they're trying to work.

00:16:43 Tim Dentry

Together you know, I said, what else would you like to share with me and one individual?

00:16:48 Tim Dentry

One of our great leaders said what we're doing in the area of appreciation for making sure that we stand for a culture of caring for one another.

00:16:59 Tim Dentry

And then we have, as a part of that racial, social and medical justice.

00:17:05 Tim Dentry

And we have as a part of that things like podcasts and other ways to listen to it.

00:17:09 Tim Dentry

Each other to make sure that people know that we we care that we're in this together that we're going to address our microaggressions or other biases, we're going to be what we want a family to be and that.

00:17:29 Tim Dentry

And that that has made them stronger.

00:17:32 Tim Dentry

And that that is help them get through this tough time.

00:17:36 Tim Dentry

And the other thing is, you know when we again I mentioned the survey but when we asked our staff we asked him this question.

00:17:45 Tim Dentry

Does northern light have a social and moral obligation to be a statewide leader in building a future?

00:17:52 Tim Dentry

Where social justice and HealthEquity reign.

00:17:55 Tim Dentry

I was I was very curious about how our entire workforce would answer that anonymously, and, you know, I wasn't so sure how would as 84% believe that northern light has a social or moral obligation be a statewide leader in building a future where social justice and HealthEquity rain.

00:18:17 Tim Dentry

That to me says we're on the right path here.

00:18:20 Tim Dentry

That to me says that it's giving people a different source of strength by feeling that they're in an organization that really does care and is getting us through kovid and it'll get us into our even brighter future.

00:18:35 Tim Dentry

So that's my most valuable lesson.

00:18:38 Tim Dentry

Is that as I started this podcast series, some folks weren't so sure we should be dedicating that kind of time.

00:18:45 Tim Dentry

We should be doing other things to put out kovid and that kind of thing.

00:18:49 Tim Dentry

My most valuable lesson is investing in listening and your people and these kinds of ways of connecting is priceless.

00:19:00 Tim Dentry

Kimberly, thank you for joining me in this very meaningful discussion.

00:19:06 Kimberly Whitehead

Well, thank you so much for inviting me here to to talk about the work that we're doing at the University of Maine and University of Maine at Matias.

00:19:15 Kimberly Whitehead

I really enjoyed our conversation and as community partners, I'd look forward to the work that you're doing here to hear more about that.

00:19:23 Kimberly Whitehead

As as you progress.

00:19:24 Tim Dentry

Absolutely, we're in this to.

00:19:26 Tim Dentry

Mother.

00:19:27 Tim Dentry

Thank you and that will wrap up this episode of Tim Talk.

00:19:31 Tim Dentry

Thank you to you.

00:19:32 Tim Dentry

Our podcast listeners also until next time I'm Tim D'entree encouraging you to listen and act to promote our culture of caring diversity and inclusion for one another.

00:19:45 Tim Dentry

Thank you.

00:19:46 Speaker 3

Thank you for listening to this episode of Tim Talk. If you enjoyed this podcast and would like to learn more about the University of Maine's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Council, please visit our website.

00:19:59 Speaker 3

We welcome you to join us next on March 4th.

00:20:02 Speaker 3

We will be talking with Doctor James Fullwood and will be discussing the history of racism and segregation in the medical profession.