



discrimination was not exclusive to patients. I witnessed colleagues, both white and black, refer patients to specialists outside our local area despite me being the only physician in town in my specialty, simply because of my ethnicity, even when their family members were my patients. It served as a stark reminder that bias can manifest in various forms, even amongst professionals. Also, explicit bias is infrequent; but implicit bias is pervasive.

However, the sting of prejudice resurfaced when I was denied staff privileges at one of the local hospitals due to my ethnicity. This blatant exclusion fueled my determination. With perseverance, community support, and media attention, I secured staff privileges over four decades ago, proving that determination can overcome even deeply-rooted biases.

Yet, amidst the negativity, there were moments of recognition and appreciation. Being invited as a speaker, at a regional medical conference of black physicians and at another national meeting of minority physicians, allowed me to share my expertise and connect with peers who understood the importance of inclusivity in healthcare. Similarly, being honored by the State Medical Society for my role in changing the law during the Gulf War, resulting in discounted medical fees for dependents of active duty soldiers, solidified my

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belief that compassion can have a tangible impact regardless of race.

Furthermore, I have had the opportunity to engage with communities beyond the walls of my office, such as giving talks on medical topics in black churches after Sunday services and at their health fairs. Gestures of appreciation from the black community, like a wave from a passing driver and a heartfelt thank you from a patient who genuinely appreciated my care beyond my skin color, served as powerful reminders of the genuine human connections.

These experiences, alongside caring for over fifty-three thousand individuals from diverse backgrounds and nationalities throughout my career, crystallized my commitment to treating each patient as an individual, regardless of their skin color, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. I transformed those experiences into a burning passion for personalized care, ensuring each patient received

the respect and dignity they deserved. The Golden Rule became my guiding light, reminding me to treat every individual as I would want to be treated. Despite the challenges, optimism fueled my resolve. By acknowledging bias, embracing inclusivity, and celebrating the unique stories of every individual, we can build a world where healthcare is truly accessible and equitable for all.

One particularly memorable encounter involved caring for the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi. Through our conversations, I gained a profound understanding of Martin Luther King's inspiration drawn from Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence and civil rights. This experience further solidified my belief in judging individuals based on their character and individual needs, not their background or skin color.

My journey has been a tapestry woven with threads of hardship and heartwarming experiences.