

**Dear South Coast community:**

Last February, Southcoast Health's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Council (DEI), with the help of its Diversity Recognition Work Group, held the first annual Southcoast Health celebration of Black History Month. Little did we know at the time what the ensuing months had in store for all of us.

At this writing, there have been 437,000 deaths, 26 million recorded cases and estimates of an actual 100 million cases of COVID-19. Mortality continues to disproportionately impact people of color, with Indigenous, Black and Hispanic people suffering at higher rates. The subject of healthcare disparities has existed for years, and their devastating impact has never been more deeply felt.

Still, we battle on, together. As we commemorate Black History Month this year, we are proud to see many Black citizens and other people of color advancing their careers and embracing new leadership roles: locally, nationally and across the country.

At Southcoast Health, there is much work being done to create a more supportive and inclusive culture for our employees and patients. In June, Southcoast Health's first Employee Resource Group (ERG), the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Coalition, was launched, and critical goals are being established:

- Our Diversity Recruiting strategy, initiated early last fall, has yielded a year-over-year increase in racial minorities (+20.6%) and females (+10.3%) being hired for leadership positions.
- Policy updates are being written that focus on employee rights and responsibilities.
- Culturally responsive educational sessions are being planned to enable all of us to work with patients and colleagues in the most cohesive and respectful way.

Southcoast employees, providers and staff will be featured on a live virtual panel, on Southcoast.org and on social media, far and wide, with a focus on career choices and development.

With great respect, gratitude and pride,

**Barbara Schmidt**

*Director of Organizational Culture and Engagement*

*Chair, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Council*

Southcoast Health