Twitter Thread by Rebekah Fenton, MD, FAAP



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It is past due time we talk about microaggressions on interviews (a thread #MedTwitter #AcademicTwitter):

First, microaggressions are harmful! Despite their name, they signal “you don’t belong here” to marginalized groups.

Second, interview days are already nerve-wrecking.

One comment or experience has the ability to undermine an interview day. Applicants may not have the ability to report immediately and anonymously or may fear retribution for doing so. Interview day microaggressions put applicants in an awkward spot in addition to the harm.

They are also not rare experiences. As a Black woman, I have experienced them at multiple institutions and different levels. I’m sharing my stories as examples of what happens, but I have no doubt there are many others, even within your institution, that need to be responded to.

College: I had an in-person panel interview for a full-tuition scholarship. One POC on the panel repeatedly asked, “where are you from?” I was 17 and eager to please, but also knew I didn’t have to share that my ancestors were traumatized thru slavery. I got flustered and bombed.

Med school: A diversity website wrote, we need more physicians of color because they are more likely to serve in underserved communities. While true, the reason we need more representation in medicine is because minoritized groups have been kept out. PERIOD. I didn’t apply there.

Residency: A peds program’s “community service” was teaching young kids about nutrition while their moms had weight loss education “to reduce their next pregnancy’s risk.” The program just assumed that Black women will keep having kids without investigating their beliefs. EWW!

Fellowship: I shared with a current fellow my interest in working with Black and Brown youth. Their response, “well you should definitely come here because we work at the juvenile detention center!” Their immediate perception was through the harmful lens of youth incarceration ■■■■■

This non-exhaustive list negatively impacted my view of each institution.

I didn’t have an opportunity to report most. When I shared once, I was told how the person had a “good heart” and is a leader so nothing can be done. Message received: power matters more than my hurt.

As interview season closes and institutions have new awareness of anti-racism, microaggressions need to be taken seriously with prompt, anonymous reporting & action that doesnt question or gaslight the recipient, but focuses on the speaker: education +/- removal from interviewing

Applicants are seeking signs in every interaction that signal safety at your institution. Microaggressions are one of the most violent forms of othering during the interview process. We need a culture shift. We need to start talking about them and making safer interviews