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Duaa Fatima, Jaspreet Gill and Aliya Kassam

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Advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion at academic medicine conferences: the need for safe spaces

Promouvoir la diversité, l'équité et l'inclusion dans les conférences de médecine universitaire : la nécessité d'espaces sûrs

Duaa Fatima,¹ Jaspreet Gill,¹ Aliya Kassam^{1,2}

¹Department of Community Health Sciences, University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada; ²Office of Postgraduate Medical Education, University of Calgary Cumming School of Medicine, Calgary, Alberta

Correspondence to: Aliya Kassam, Department of Community Health Sciences, University of Calgary, 2500 University Dr NW, Calgary, AB T2N 1N4, Calgary, Alberta, Canada; email: kassama@ucalgary.ca

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To the Editor,

We appreciate the insights of the Thoma et al., article pertaining to the CanMEDS 2025 revision and their acknowledgement that this revision occurs during a “transformation to society.”¹ We would like to underscore the importance around safety during these discussions such as the “growing acknowledgement of the impacts of colonialism, systemic discrimination” especially at international conferences where such discourses take place.¹

For example, a prominent discussion regarding the revised CanMEDS 2025 competency framework centring on inclusive compassion and shared humanity encouraged medical professionals to commit to addressing healthcare inequities and injustices.² The presenter received backlash from an audience member who loudly expressed discomfort, shutting down the conversation through a series of hostile questions. The audience member declared themselves as the knowledge holder, leveraging existing medical hierarchies to exclude trainee and community voices.

This led to hesitation in the room to participate, possibly to maintain professional status, working relationships with colleagues, and safety to avoid offending others. The moderator's existing working relationship with the audience member impeded their ability to create a safe

environment for discourse. Moderators at future academic medicine conferences must embrace empathy to facilitate discussions inclusive of diverse experiences, distributing power in an egalitarian way.³ Given that Thoma et al suggest “the open publication of these emerging concepts should provide Canadian and international medical communities with an opportunity to discuss and comment on this work” we would like to emphasize the importance of creating safe spaces for these discussions and prioritizing equal distribution of power.^{1,3}

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