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NAFD NEWS

Examining the funeral sector's approach to systemic racism

The death of George Floyd, in America, and the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests has prompted many organisations and sectors across the world to pause and reflect on whether there is more they can, and should, do to promote racial equality - the NAFD included.

Systemic racism is often hard to put your finger on because it's about beliefs and practices that are so hardwired into society that they are unquestioned and unnoticed - except by those for whom they may represent a barrier to inclusivity, equality, progress or acceptance.

Systemic racism also isn't about violence. It's about everyday decisions, words and deeds - often made by people who would be mortified at the

thought that something they said, or did, could be thought of as racist.

As the sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva has said: "The main problem nowadays is not the folks with the hoods, but the folks dressed in suits."

In truth, although the work of funeral directors is largely blind to colour, lifestyle choice or beliefs, as a profession (and the NAFD as a trade body) with a long history spanning many centuries, there are likely to be traditions and

practices that were created with the best of intentions, but which no longer reflect the world around us.

We've already successfully welcomed many more female funeral directors into a profession that, until the 1980s, was almost exclusively the preserve of men. We must now play our part in achieving a more equal society for everyone by looking more closely at racial and cultural diversity in the funeral profession, and in the NAFD as a trade association too.

One issue that we are already aware of and seeking to tackle through our review of the NAFD Code of Practice, is whether the current professional standards requirements of the Code of Practice unintentionally preclude or dissuade some specialist funeral firms that serve particular BAME/religious communities from becoming members.

We do not intend to rush out initiatives or statements in response to this. Our intention is to be willing to actively listen and to change, where necessary, and to demonstrate a fully inclusive and open approach through meaningful action.

Over the summer, we will be undertaking a review of the NAFD and funeral profession's approach to racial equality - and will be seeking to hear from as wide a range of voices from within the profession, and wider world, as possible.

Our intention is to bring forward an honest assessment in the Autumn, together with recommendations for the NAFD and its members.