



**KERN NATIONAL NETWORK**  
FOR CARING & CHARACTER IN MEDICINE

## Remarks on the KNN Bridging Across Differences Toward Flourishing Initiative

Given by Cheryl A. Maurana, PhD, on September 29, 2022,  
during the inaugural KNN national conference

At this time, I would like to introduce an important focus area for the KNN as we move forward, that of bridging across differences toward flourishing.

As Barbara Fredrickson aptly said, "Flourishing is not a solo endeavor." However, at this moment in history, we find ourselves in an extraordinary time of divisiveness and polarization.

The societal upheaval of the past few years has brought an especially sharp focus on issues that are deeply personal for many of us and often difficult to discuss under the best of circumstances. As a result, it has become even more difficult to hold sustained, rigorous and vitally important discussions about which actions to take, and when.

Diversity of thought and constructive disagreement are being called into question, bringing unprecedented challenges for both individual and societal flourishing. To paraphrase Isaac Newton, we are building too many walls and not enough bridges.

In the face of this divisiveness, then, how can we find ways to bridge across differences toward flourishing?

I think we can begin this work by making a commitment to what sociologist Robert Putnam describes as bridging social capital. Through bridging, we can overcome our tendency to break away from others whom we see as different, and we can cultivate relationships that can lead to bonding by forging deeper ties with one another.

The KNN is committed to work in this important area. We are willing to ask difficult questions, find common ground and build a foundation for creating value. To do that, we see character, caring and practical wisdom, the hallmarks of the KNN, playing a crucial role.

There is no question that such steps toward understanding involve hard work, and I recognize that not everyone may agree with the position I am putting forward. I respect that and welcome a dialogue. Most important, I encourage you not to remain silent.

Going forward, strong partnerships will remain the bedrock of the KNN's work, supporting open inquiry and building a culture strengthened by differences and connected by trust.

As you attend the conference sessions, and when you return home, I ask each of you to consider how you might contribute to this bridging effort. Perhaps, to listen differently to the presentations and consider how you might talk with others who may not share your views.

I invite you to employ a mindset of open inquiry, one that involves:

- being open to learning from others and taking an interest in their perspectives;
- seeking truth;
- challenging our own and others' assumptions;
- respecting differing points of view; and,
- practicing intellectual humility.<sup>1</sup>

We will be sharing more about this initiative in the coming months; efforts will include a community of practice, thought leadership and convenings. Please consider joining us on this important journey to build more bridges toward flourishing.

We, in academic medicine, have the opportunity, or I would argue, the responsibility, to play a leadership role in this critical work. ■

*1. Adapted from Courageous Dialogue Toolkit by Barbara Whitlock and Karen E. Bohlin with Deborah Farmer Kris and Gabrielle Landry [https://bbk12e1-cdn.myschoolcdn.com/ftpimages/465/misc/misc\\_244215.pdf](https://bbk12e1-cdn.myschoolcdn.com/ftpimages/465/misc/misc_244215.pdf)*

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