

# WE HAVE TO CHANGE IT'

## Jefferson CEO says systemic racism in the health care industry must be addressed

While protestors have spent weeks in Philadelphia and around the country demonstrating against racial inequities in the justice system, Jefferson Health CEO Dr. Stephen Klasko said it's also time for health care disparities to take center stage.

"Here's what I'd say for Philadelphia," said Klasko, speaking during last week's Philadelphia Business Journal "Power Interview" virtual event. "Isn't it embarrassing that if you walk 10 minutes to the right of the Rocky statue [at the Philadelphia Museum of Art] or 10 minutes to the left of the Rocky statue, there's a 20-year difference in life expectancy."

"We have to all stop with our 30-second commercial about how great we are, whether it's insurers in town or the providers in town," he said. "We are great. People come into our great hospitals, but we have all not done what

we need to do to really take care of those most underserved patients."

Jefferson has taken steps to address the problem of health care disparities, Klasko said. The organization has used proceeds from its last three galas not on something like "a new MRI, so I can have a better MRI than my competitor," but on efforts to building strong ties with community organizations, he said.

One such project is the Philadelphia Collaborative for Health Equity, a broad-based community collaboration and action network established in 2018 to address health inequality challenges in the city.

"[We are looking at] how can we partner with the African American community? How can we partner with [nonprofit Hispanic social and health services organization] Esperanza? How can we partner with the Southeast Asian community in South Philadelphia?" he said. "Not for Jefferson, but for Jefferson working with the community."

*Klasko, who is also president of Thomas Jefferson University, said more work needs to be done to produce more African American doctors.*

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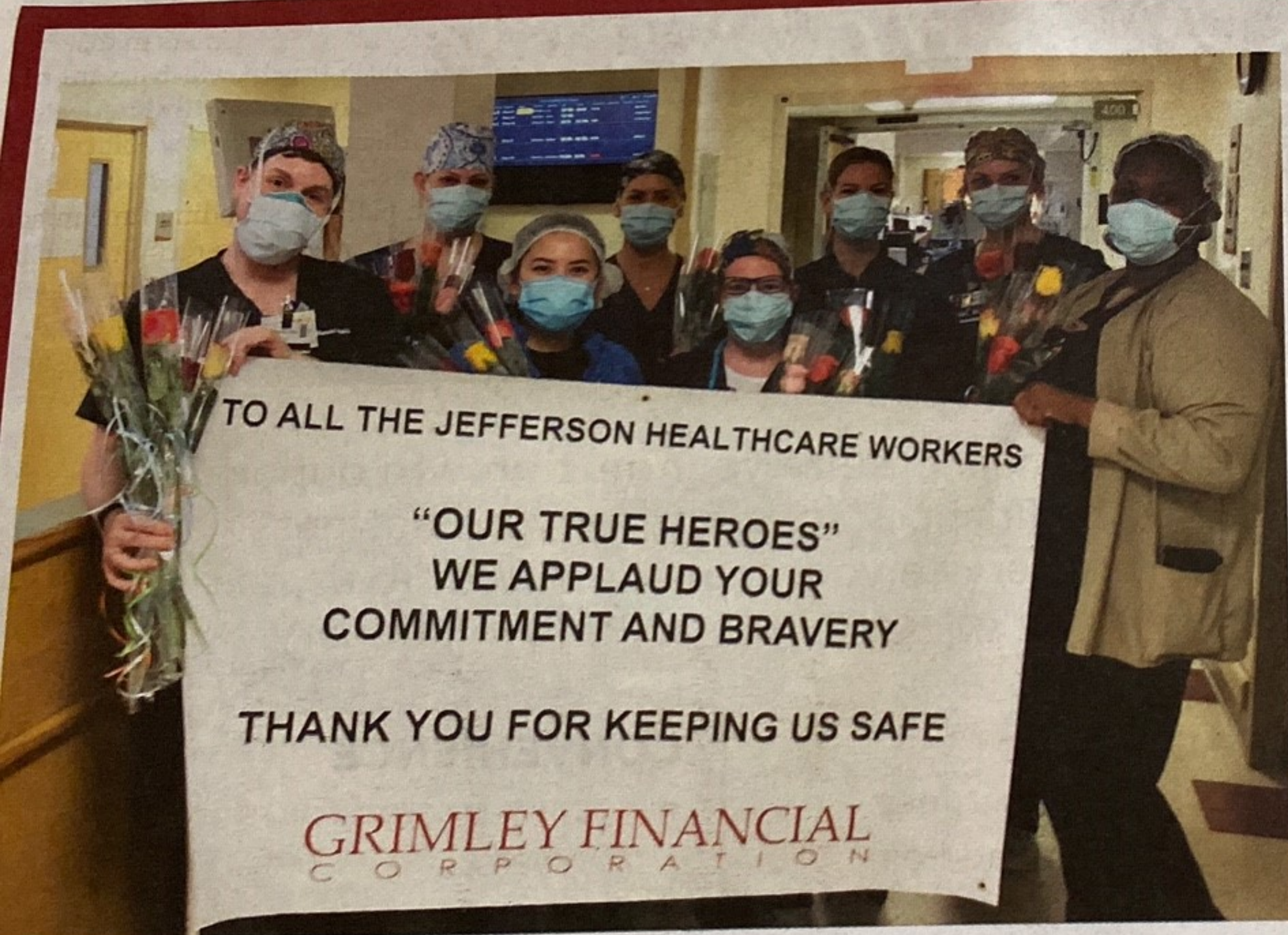
He said one of the "systemic" problems the country has is how medical schools recruit and educate future physicians. "We select and educate doctors in a wrong way," Klasko said. "We base it on science, GPA, MCAT, physics, chemistry grades. And we're not more empathetic."

He said the percentage of African American males in medical schools has shrunk to 4% since 1978. One reason, he said, is that many applicants don't have the resources to compete with affluent parents. "They generally spend \$100,000 dollars to get their son or daughter five Princeton Review college admission preparation] and they're not even getting in."

Klasko suggested looking at how other countries address health disparities globally, the way climate change is addressed.

"I want us to basically really address racism as health care professionals or as a society around neglecting folks that are not white — many folks of color," he said. "We have to change it."

In five years, Klasko hopes Jefferson Health has talked about for improving the way for reducing its point of disparity.



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