

Dear MANA Board Member,

Over the last 6 months there have been several troubling interactions and we, the members of the MOC Inner Council would like to take this opportunity to discuss our perspective on our relationship with MANA and the action we are taking.

Currently the MOC Inner Council consists of: Jennie Joseph, Ayesha Ibrahim, Jessica Roach, and Claudia Booker - Michele Peixinho had agreed to return to the Inner Council upon her return from the Philippines. Our goal in creating the Inner Council included being available to assist Darynée, to make decisions for the MOC based on a consensus model, to provide support and advice to her, and to serve as Chair in her stead.

In the last three years the position of MOC Chair has been held by three different Midwives of Color - Sheila Simms Watson, Michele Peixinho, and Jennie Joseph - it is now held by Darynée Blount. A question to be asked - if the MOC Chair is a 3-year term, how come all of the recent Chairs resigned after roughly one year into the term? What about MANA and its leadership, the MOC membership (or lack of membership involvement) and their relationship, that such firmly committed, hardworking, bright women relinquish this position?

The answer lies in examining MANA, both the organization and the individuals in leadership positions, interaction with the MOC. It is clear to us that MANA's ethos of their unearned entitlement that continues to dis-value and ignore us as a group and as individuals. At best we are an afterthought.

MANA continues to spout canned responses in support of: various race, gender, social justice issues; 20,000 midwives by 2012; more midwives of color to serve communities of color; end racial disparities in health care;, etc..., while not actually developing workable strategies and expending resources (and if so, begrudgingly supporting after endless negotiations) to achieve any of them.

With MANA's frequently changing leadership there is a constant need to educate, sensitize, and re-educate a new cadre of young and older women who "do not get it". Since MANA lacks an organizational vision and mission statement (with an accompanying detailed and concrete action plan to accomplish these) that clearly defines MANA's position on such issues as social justice, privilege and entitlement, racial disparities, increasing the number of midwives and MOCs, we must address and re-address these issues each year, over and over again.

The Inner Council spent one month this year re-visiting (and soliciting MOC input on whether and how to move forward with the POU) the 2009 Points of Unity, which were written by some of you during an emotionally turbulent conference in Asolimar. With the warrior- like commitment of then MOC Chair Michele, MANA provided 24 scholarships and had the highest attendance of midwives and students of color in its history. But the atmosphere of the conference was so stressful the MOC felt driven to write its Manifesto, a Document of Affirmations. This internal document chronicling this time in MOC history and belongs to the MOC and that group has the unilateral right to decide what to do with that document. The 2009 POU does not belong to MANA or to the Social Justice section of MANA, nor is it available to be used as a campaign platform for future MANA leadership.

The following year, 2010, MANA provided significantly fewer scholarships to its conference in Nashville. MANA's commitment of increasing students and midwives of color participation at its conferences was short lived. MANA requested Michele personally raise funds for MOC scholarships if we wanted more MOC attendees. Michele subsequently resigned and Jennie took the Chair. It appears that MANA has a budget of \$6,000 for all scholarships, with the 2009 funding being an exception.

For the 2011 Conference in Canada, after much negotiation and hand wringing, MANA agreed to Jennie's request for 12 scholarships; many of these went to students of color, and a suite for us to sleep and meet in. What an oasis for us! We spent sleepless hours sharing, healing ourselves, and developing a plan for utilizing the suite at the 2012 conference as a center for workshops, skills practice, classes, vision board making, movie showing.

In recapping this history my mind keeps shouting, "If MANA is committed to increasing the numbers of midwives and students of color, why is there a need to fight for scholarships to the MANA Conferences year after year? Either MANA is committed or it is not? What's up with that?" The real issue is simply MANA's commitment - nothing else.

For one year Jennie fought wholeheartedly to keep the issues of racial disparities in healthcare and midwifery and maternal and infant care on the front burner of MANA; to keep us at the center of MANA's decision making; to get the organization to put its time, resources, influence, and money into developing (with the communities of color and the health care providers that serve them); concrete, sustainable strategies for saving mothers in babies. All issues MANA professes to support but has no concrete strategies to achieve. Jennie spent a substantial portion of her time away from her practice, family, clinic, and school (plus her own money) representing MANA and the programs it professes to support across the U.S., while getting little tangible support from MANA.

Keep in mind that in the United States, "Births to Black mothers made up 16% of U.S. births, but 30.4% of US infant deaths in 2008" (The U.S. Infant Mortality Rate: International Comparisons, Underlying Factors, and Federal Programs - Elayne J. Heisler Analyst in Health Services April 4, 2012)

In September 2011 Jennie resigned as the MOC Chair and Darynée Blount agreed to accept the Chair position, with the creation of an Inner Council. Darynée is young, energetic, optimistic, and eager to make the MOC a success and willing to give MANA and its leadership a fresh start. She believes MANA has the potential to become a productive organization, responsive to its members, and concretely working on improving maternal and infant care. Besides being a full-time midwife and a mom, she has a midwifery training program she is dedicated to. She was instrumental in making the recent CAM Conferences a success.

One of the first things she negotiated was the Inner Council's active participation in reviewing proposed abstracts and the agenda for the 2012 MANA Conference. However, our participation was made meaningless. The third week in March we received a 64 page document which was a disorganized compilation of the various proposed abstracts MANA had received. Several of us spent more the 4 days reviewing the proposed abstracts in detail, writing general comments on them, especially their failure to address the required cultural competency criteria set out by MANA in the abstract application. Next, we compiled a list of about 20 suggested topics

for Conference workshops that addressed the multi-cultural world of midwifery in the Americas and health issue of those communities. We submitted our comments to MANA in less than 1 week and were informed that our comments were too late. We have not been involved in the final selection of the abstracts or the agenda for the upcoming Conference.

In response to MANA's request that the MOC submit abstracts for the upcoming Conference, three of us decided to submit an abstract for our "Saving Our Babies, Mothers and Families Then and Now Midwives Save Lives: An Introduction to the Grand Midwives of America A Pictorial History of African-American Midwifery in the United States 1600's - Present" presentation we recently presented at the VIDM. This seems every pertinent after viewing the historically incorrect and scanty time line of midwifery in the U.S posted at the Home Birth Summit and the CPM Symposium. Our abstract was summarily rejected with a comment, "Perhaps next conference". We are withdrawing the presentation from present or future consideration for a MANA Conference. What a missed opportunity to correct history.

A few days before the beginning of February MANA requested the MOC prepare a series of weekly Constant Contact blasts for Black History Month (which is February); we had a few days' notice to plan and prepare. MANA contributed practically nothing to this effort, except a statement from Gera Simkins with an excerpt from her book. Their explanation for not participating was that they felt inadequate to contribute to this effort. Did MANA not know Black History Week was coming and, perhaps, could have spent some time planning some sort of recognition in a timely manner? Another MANA afterthought?

On last Tuesday MANA informed us that the third in the "I Am a Midwife" video series will be launched this Saturday. The topic of this video is health disparities. We were requested to write a blog of between 500 - 1,000 words on the mothering .com blog on the issue of health disparities, with internet links on research and resources and great photos, and to post the blog by Monday. We were not involved in the scripting or development of the video (though it features several midwives of color) nor have we viewed the video. Is this a topic MANA is not familiar with? While the video was being developed, could MANA or its staff have done its research on the topic? No, once again, last minute calls to the MOC to provide substance and validation of this project, without any input in the development or planning. Once again, an act of arrogant entitlement, with the MOC participation as an afterthought.

Meanwhile, the MANA leadership and the leadership of the other Allied Midwifery Organizations (excluding ICTC who was not invited) are in Washington attending a Childbirth Connection event on maternal and infant health. Did MANA or any of the other professed ICTC allies seek an invitation for ICTC?

In the last few weeks the issue of student and midwives of color scholarships to the 2012 Conference has again arisen. In March Darynee submitted a proposal that MANA open its doors to all students and MOCs who want to attend. In the last week the discussion of MOC raising its own funds to provide for MOC scholarships was again raised. Here we go again - is participation by students and midwives of color important to MANA, yes or no? If so, support your commitment with a sizable financial contribution that could make an impact!

Having suffered through the CPM Symposium, we Sisters have spent too many days trying to help MANA, its leadership and the leadership of the other AMOs "get it". And they still do not.

We have committed ourselves to our local and global communities we serve first and foremost, doing the best we can with dignity and character knowing that our communities and our children are watching.

We can no longer continue to participate in MANA's disrespect of us as a group, a race, as the Women our community respects. We cannot keep our heads held high and take this shit. Our view of ourselves will suffer and eventually the young ones will look at us with less than admiration. We are not "The Help - 2012 Version". This treatment is not good for us, mentally, physically, emotionally and psychologically - this is the stress that's kills us in so many ways, drains our energy and distracts our focus.

These issues and these organizations distract us from our true mission; we have become myopic, focusing on these groups and not exploring global approaches to maternal and infant health care, increasing the number of MOCs, and better serving our communities.

Therefore, I Darynée Blount, am resigning from the position of MOC Chair, the MOC and MANA and we Jennie Joseph, Jessica Roach, Ayesha Ibrahim, Claudia Booker and Michelle Peixinho are hereby formally resigning from the Inner Council, the MOC and MANA.

Darynée Blount, Jennie Joseph, Jessica Roach, Ayesha Ibrahim, Claudia Booker and Michelle Peixinho