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Filling The Device Sector's Diversity Gap: MedTech Color Builds Support

by [David Filmore](#)

MedTech Color is focused on enhancing diversity in the device and diagnostics space and increasing thought leadership opportunities for people of color in the industry. The organization held a launch event at this year's MedTech Conference in Philadelphia, where *Medtech Insight* caught up with founder Kwame Ulmer.

The device sector has fallen behind other industries in addressing the lack of ethnic diversity among its executives and entrepreneurs, and directed efforts are needed to address the gaps. That's the message from Kwame Ulmer and others who officially launched a new group last week called MedTech Color to help tackle the issue.

Medtech Insight caught up with Ulmer, a device industry consultant and former US FDA official, at the breakfast launch event for the group Sept. 26 in Philadelphia, where AdvaMed's MedTech Conference was taking place. As an industry, "We are a bit behind," Ulmer, a device industry consultant and former US FDA official, told *Medtech Insight*. "We have some work to do, but now we have a platform and a place to do it." (See our interview with Ulmer in the video below.)

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MedTech Color has three core objectives, says Ulmer: To build a community of people of color within medtech; to increase the numbers of underrepresented groups in the medtech space, and to enhance their thought-leadership role in the sector. Backers point to the value of diverse points of view and experiences in accelerating new types of innovations that address the needs of new patient populations.

The organization is at least one year in the making; organizers first got together to discuss the concept at last year's AdvaMed conference. (Also see "[A Helping Hand: 'MedTech Color' Aims To Move Minorities From Shop Floor To Executive Suite](#)" - Medtech Insight, 28 Nov, 2017.) Since then, the focus has been on formally establishing a non-profit organization and attracting sponsors. Danaher, Medtronic, and Johnson & Johnson are among the firms that have signed on with financial and planning support.

Ulmer has also attracted support from key opinion leaders in the industry. Kevin Lobo, CEO of Stryker, appeared at the Sept. 26 event and pledged his support as he transitions into the board chairman role of AdvaMed in March. (Also see "[Stryker CEO Kevin Lobo Is Incoming Chair At AdvaMed](#)" - Medtech Insight, 2 Oct, 2018.) Michelle McMurray-Heath, J&J's VP of clinical and regulatory affairs and a former FDA official, spoke on a panel at the breakfast. Others in attendance included Smith & Nephew executive Martha Shadan, who chairs the AdvaMed Accel emerging company board of directors, and Bakul Patel, associate director for digital health at FDA's device center.

Ulmer says one near-term goal of the organization is to track how often people of color are speakers at major industry conferences and to convene its own conference to spotlight the expertise in its community. Longer term, the organization wants to serve as a network of supporters and mentors for entrepreneurs of color in medtech.

"There are start-ups in places like Kentucky, Northern California and Detroit where there are people from underrepresented groups building amazing technology to help people," he said. "If we just get focused on a few meaningful ways to leverage capital for those communities, we will be fine."

From the editors of The Gray Sheet