

FUTURE CRISES IN MANPOWER FOR MEDICINE:
INCREASING THE NUMBER OF MINORITY PHYSICIANS

ROBERT W. HALEY, M.D.

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Minority recruiting effort at UT slows

Official says state saturated; students disagree

By Anna Macias

Austin Bureau of The News

AUSTIN — Minority recruitment efforts at the University of Texas have reached the "point of diminishing returns," and officials say they plan to concentrate more on retaining the black and Hispanic students already in school.

"I feel that we are doing extremely well on recruitment," said Ronald Brown, vice president of student affairs. "But I feel there is a point of diminishing returns with recruitment, especially when we are bringing in (minority) students and they are not doing well."

Some, including minority students, disagree with UT officials

and say that the university is not trying hard enough to recruit minority students.

Since the university's primary purpose is to graduate students, Brown said, it might be wise to focus on retaining the 3.4 percent of students who are black and 9.3 percent who are Hispanic.

"If we were to spend another \$100,000 on recruitment, we probably would not recruit more minorities," Brown said. "We're already saturating the state. The number of blacks and Hispanic students who graduate from high schools and show some sign of being able to succeed here has leveled off."

Brown cautioned that his re-

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INTERNAL MEDICINE GRAND ROUNDS

SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL SCHOOL

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER AT DALLAS

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The Problem

In recent years there has been growing concern over the discouraging prospects of careers in science and medicine for members of racial minorities, particularly blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians. While blacks constitute 10% of the total labor force in the United States, they make up only 2.5% of the science and engineering work force. Even among those in scientific careers, a disproportionately large number occupy social and behavioral science positions in local governmental agencies, whereas relatively few are involved in basic research, engineering and medicine. In 1950, only 2.1% of all the physicians in the U.S. were black, and by 1980 only 2.6% were. In 1981 less than 2% of faculty members in U.S. medical schools were black. Current trends are not promising for an increase in the numbers of minorities in medicine and medical research. Throughout the past 20 years, blacks have constituted fewer than 6% of new entrants to U.S. medical schools and 5% of medical-school graduates. Moreover, half of all black medical students attend one of three all-black medical schools.

This problem is of particular importance in view of recent discussions of the disproportionate health problems of black Americans and the potential importance of having more black physicians and medical researchers who might give these problems higher priority. For example, the average life expectancy of black American males is 5 years shorter than that for white American males (65.3 vs. 70.5 years), and the infant mortality rate for blacks is twice as high as that for whites (21.8 vs. 11.4 deaths per 1000 live births). In certain rural areas, the disparities are even more extreme in average male life expectancy (49-52 years for black men vs. 60-69 years for white men in 6 rural counties in Georgia) and in infant mortality (over 43 deaths per 1000 live births in some rural Georgia counties).

Perceived Causes

Although other minority groups, such as women and Asians, have, and still may, suffer from discrimination, their gains in scientific fields, including medicine, have been far more rapid. For example, the percentage of students enrolled in medical schools who are Asian Americans has doubled since 1970 (1.4% to 2.8%). Similarly, there has been a 181% increase in science and engineering doctorates awarded to women since 1970. Obviously, the obstacles to such gains for blacks, Hispanics and American Indians are much deeper and more fundamental.

Among the more often mentioned obstacles are the following. Blacks more often come from families with no tradition of higher education, have attended segregated secondary schools where higher educational advancement was not common, received little encouragement for higher education from teachers, and were less likely to have available or to take advanced high school courses. Entrance to higher education is more difficult because Blacks and some other minorities typically score lower on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) than whites. For example, in 1985 the variation in average scores on the SAT verbal test was as follows: whites 449, blacks 346, Mexicans 382 and Puerto Ricans 373; and on the Math test: whites 490, blacks 376, Puerto Ricans 405 and Asians 518. Once accepted to colleges and universities, minorities are less likely to graduate. For example, the percentage of enrolled students who completed U.S. engineering schools is 70% overall, but only 30% for blacks and 40% for Hispanics. This has been attributed both to inadequate preparation and to the lack of role models of their own race among faculty at predominantly white schools.

Current Solutions

According to a workshop held in November 1986 at the National Academy of Sciences, prospects for increasing the enrollment of minority students do not appear good. Most approaches tend to focus on more exposure to advanced courses and better recruiting at the high school level and on faculty encouragement, "mentoring," vocational counseling, minority student support services, and information on minority programs and sources of finances at the college and university level. While these efforts should be vigorously pursued, evidence that they will make a large difference is lacking.

Another approach is that of the Federal Court mandate. In 1978 the Office of Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education began a statewide review of higher education in Texas under the authority of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This review was part of a nationwide review of states that formerly operated de jure racially dual systems of public higher education to take action to overcome the effects of any prior discrimination as a condition for receiving federal assistance. In 1983, a plan for increasing minority enrollment and faculty integration in the University of Texas System, submitted in 1981, was approved by the Office of Civil Rights. Currently entering the fifth year of the five-year plan, the prospects for meeting the minority recruiting goals of the agreement for the UT System are not good. What action will follow is uncertain.

Epidemiologic Investigations

To attempt to develop a broader base of information on the problem that might lead us to a more effective solution, we undertook an epidemiologic investigation of minority enrollment at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas. From analysis of the computerized records of all applicants to Southwestern Medical School and accepted students, we confirmed the trends reported in the literature. Despite vigorous recruiting efforts, blacks constitute only approximately 5% of applicants, and, while 67% of white applicants score above 50 on the Medical College Aptitude Test (MCAT), only 8% of blacks did.

We undertook a second investigation of primary and secondary education in the Dallas Independent School District (DISD) to identify, if possible, remediable deficiencies in the public educational system that might be addressed to reverse the present trends. Instead, the investigation uncovered a dramatic increase in achievement in minority students which was accompanied by persistent gains above national norms in achievement among white students. The gains were attributable to a test-based management and accountability system introduced into the DISD in 1978-79. The particular patterns of increasing achievement provide grounds for optimism that minority, as well as white, students who will be graduating from Dallas public schools over the next decade will be better prepared for higher education than those from past generations.

Conclusion

While current efforts for more efficient recruitment and retention of minority students, though of unproven efficacy, must be vigorously pursued, there is new evidence that a movement toward accountability in primary and secondary education may improve the higher educational potential of minority students that has been wasted in past generations. University programs to increase minority enrollment must include aggressive support for accountability programs in public school districts.

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