

Recruitment of Underrepresented Minorities in Medical School Through a Student-led Initiative

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Abstract: The goal of matriculating a diverse medical cohort remains important for institutions across the country as it results in an increase in the diversity of the physician workforce. By admitting students who are underrepresented in medicine, the pressing health needs of the growing and diverse patient population of our country can be met by physicians who are representative of their communities. Given the challenges of choosing from a small pool of applicants, medical schools should consider seeking the support of current medical students in expanding the applicant pool and recruiting the next generation of physicians. The purpose of this paper is to describe a student-led initiative established at the University of Kentucky College of Medicine for recruiting students underrepresented in medicine. Through this pipeline program, current underrepresented applicants experience a two-day recruitment event that introduces them to life as a medical student. Incorporating current medical students in recruitment programming allows institutions to access a knowledgeable and inspirational resource that is readily available. Current medical students can provide firsthand perspectives into the journey that is medical school while serving as role models for future physicians.

Keywords: Underrepresented in medicine ■ Recruitment ■ Diversity ■ Minority ■ Admissions

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INTRODUCTION

Minority physicians play an important role in the care of diverse patient populations. Most US medical schools are considering ways to diversify their cohort to reflect the demographics of society and the communities they serve by recruiting more students from backgrounds that are underrepresented in medicine. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), “*underrepresented in medicine* means those racial and ethnic populations that are underrepresented in the medical profession relative to their numbers in the general population.”¹ Groups underrepresented in medicine may be comprised of individuals from

different racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Research suggests that physicians underrepresented in medicine are more likely to practice in areas that are mostly populated by minorities.² That said, recent medical school enrollment data demonstrate that the number of minority matriculants are not in keeping with the health service needs of minority populations. The US Census Bureau Reports from July 2014 estimate that African Americans made up 13.2% of the US population.³ However, only 6.2% of total enrolled allopathic medical students across the US were African American over the same period.⁴ Data such as these are indicative of the work that still needs to be done in order to identify, enroll, and graduate a population of medical students that are reflective of their communities.

Therefore, it is imperative to have a diverse student body at educational institutions that prepare future health leaders (e.g., physicians, pharmacists, nurses, etc.) as studies report health care providers underrepresented in medicine have been shown to care for underrepresented populations when compared to their counterparts.⁵ Diversity in background and experience fosters an educational environment that encourages cultural competency and enhances the growth of an institution not just as a whole, but by expanding individual perspectives as well.⁶ Continued and extended efforts to increase the diversity of medical school classes are warranted.

EXEMPLARS OF MODEL MEDICAL SCHOOL RECRUITMENT PROGRAMS

In recent decades, there have been a multitude of efforts aimed at recruiting and matriculating a diverse group of students into medical schools. Such efforts include pipeline programs beginning at the high school level or earlier, mentoring programs during college, and post-baccalaureate programs. Some of these efforts are noteworthy because of unique resources utilized. For example, the admissions office at the University of Toledo College of Medicine and medical students of their Student National

Medical Association (SNMA) chapter collaborated to establish a strategic recruitment program for pre-medical students underrepresented in medicine.⁷ Similarly, the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine established an introductory course on Healthcare Disparities that was incorporated into the first-year curriculum which demonstrated outcomes in increasing medical student diversity.⁶ From each recruitment effort, differences in terms of eligible participants, program details, and program structure contributed to their success.

Our efforts at the University of Kentucky College of Medicine (UKCOM) rely on the contributions of our medical students, along with support from minority medical student organizations, in attaining these same levels of success. Referencing Rumala’s work at Toledo where medical students were the guiding force behind an outreach program, the University of Kentucky Medical Education Development (UKMED) Program was developed to recruit minority pre-medical students. The UKMED Program relies on the active participation and implementation of the program by current medical students who are underrepresented in medicine.

UKMED PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

At UKCOM, we believe that education, research, and service missions are enriched by a community of individuals from diverse backgrounds. In order to care for the people of Appalachia and other medically underserved areas, the College of Medicine remains committed to building a community of physicians who reflect the demography of the growing and diverse population of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Efforts to increase the number of applicants who are underrepresented in medicine have always existed at our institution. However, the inception of UKMED resulted in a structured approach to recruitment, designed by our medical students that aimed to increase the diversity of UKCOM graduates by targeting prospective candidates from underserved populations across Kentucky.

The UKMED Program was established in 2010 by a first-year medical student who sought to find innovative ways to increase the number of students underrepresented in medicine who apply and matriculate into UKCOM. Based on a recruiting program she experienced at Georgia Institute of Technology called the FOCUS Program,⁸ the decision was made to invite prospective students who were within two years of applying to medical school for a two-day experience that would introduce them to Lexington, the University, the medical school, and the medical education experience of current students. The student leaders of UKMED collaborate with the UKCOM Admissions Office, the Area Health Education Center Program (AHEC), and the

Table 1. UKMED Participants 2010–2015.

Year	Applied to UKMED	Participated in UKMED
2010	20	16
2011	29	18
2012	23	19
2013	38	31
2014	57	23
2015	47	23

Health Center Student Diversity Services Program (HCSDS) to plan and execute the program.

Recruitment and selection

Eligible candidates for selection to the UKMED Program are college juniors or seniors, graduate students, or post-baccalaureate graduates interested in applying to medical school. Several strategies are used in the recruitment of program applicants. Pre-medical advisors from across the state are sent information regarding the program and brochures to distribute to students at their colleges and universities. They are encouraged to forward information and web links to prospective candidates who are underrepresented in medicine whose residence is in or around our state. Collegiate offices of institutional diversity and student support services are also contacted to help identify candidates for the UKMED program. Finally, individual outreach efforts are made by UKMED leaders, members of the UKCOM chapter of SNMA, and staff from UKCOM’s Admissions, AHEC, and Diversity Offices to reach out to prospective candidates that they meet at regular recruiting events such as at the national Annual Medical Education Conference hosted by SNMA. Word-of-mouth communications from previous UKMED participants to their friends and classmates has also helped expand the applicant pool to this program.

Candidates for the UKMED program must complete an online application asking for their name, college attended, major/minor, demographics, GPA, MCAT scores (if available), legal residence, list of extracurricular activities, a short essay as to why they would like to participate in the program and a statement of how they learned about the program. A selection committee comprised of the UKMED program coordinators including up to three student leaders, the UKCOM admissions director and assistant director, the AHEC director, and HCSDS director, and a minority affairs officer review all applications. Using holistic review and a deliberative process, participants are selected based upon why they want to participate in the program and how it is perceived that the

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