

Black men increasingly hard to find in medical schools

A dwindling share of students pursuing physician careers are African-American men. Experts warn that the trend could exacerbate racial health disparities and doctor shortages.

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As a medical student, Frank A. Clark, MD, was one of the few African-American men in his class. It wasn't that he saw black men being rejected from medical school. The bigger problem was that he didn't see many on track to get there at all. "Even during my collegiate career, I was a biology major with a minor in chemistry, and I didn't see many other African-American males on the premed route," says Dr. Clark, now a psychiatry resident at Palmetto Richland Memorial Hospital in Columbia, S.C.

Black men are notable in that their numbers are lagging even as other minorities and women are continuing a long-term trend of gaining greater representation among medical school applicants and students, according to the most recent Assn. of American Medical Colleges report on medical education diversity. The organization warns that the trend could worsen disparities of care and exacerbate doctor shortages, particularly in urban areas, which are more likely to be staffed by black doctors.

The report said 2.5% of medical school applicants were black men in 2011, a drop from 2.6% in 2002. That compares with 9% and 11% increases in the share of Asian and Hispanic male applicants, respectively, during the same period. A 10% greater

THE LAST DECADE RESHAPED MEDICAL SCHOOL DIVERSITY

The proportion of African-American men in medical schools has fallen since 2002, while a rising share of medical students come from Asian and Hispanic backgrounds.

| Group | 2002 applicants (%) | 2011 applicants (%) | 2002 matriculants (%) | 2011 matriculants (%) |
|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| White men | 10,483 (31.2%) | 13,506 (30.8%) | 5,355 (32.5%) | 6,252 (32.5%) |
| White women | 8,974 (26.7%) | 10,451 (23.8%) | 4,619 (28.0%) | 4,808 (25.0%) |
| Asian men | 2,965 (8.8%) | 4,645 (10.6%) | 1,474 (8.9%) | 1,968 (10.2%) |
| Asian women | 2,984 (8.9%) | 4,296 (9.8%) | 1,556 (9.4%) | 1,891 (9.8%) |
| Hispanic men | 1,167 (3.5%) | 1,655 (3.8%) | 549 (3.3%) | 790 (4.1%) |
| Hispanic women | 1,274 (3.8%) | 1,804 (4.1%) | 581 (3.5%) | 843 (4.4%) |
| Black men | 874 (2.6%) | 1,107 (2.5%) | 391 (2.4%) | 445 (2.3%) |
| Black women | 1,738 (5.2%) | 2,108 (4.8%) | 735 (4.5%) | 737 (3.8%) |
| Total | 33,625 | 43,919 | 16,488 | 19,230 |

NOTE: INDIVIDUALS WHO DID NOT MARK A RACE OR ETHNICITY, OR WHO IDENTIFIED AS MULTIRACIAL, FOREIGNERS, NATIVE AMERICANS, ALASKANS, HAWAIIANS OR OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDERS ARE NOT INCLUDED IN THIS CHART.

SOURCE: "DIVERSITY IN MEDICAL EDUCATION: FACTS & FIGURES 2012," ASSN. OF AMERICAN MEDICAL COLLEGES, NOVEMBER 2012; "MINORITIES IN MEDICAL EDUCATION: FACTS & FIGURES 2005," AAMC

share of matriculating students were Asian men in 2011 than in 2002, and Hispanic men made up a 24% larger proportion of new medical students. The share of white male applicants and matriculants was stable.

Growth in the number of African-American women applying for — and attending — medical school has been comparatively weak as well, with their representation, as a percentage of all applicants and graduates, also in decline. However, their numbers are still enough to create, as they have for some time, the biggest gender gap among all racial or ethnic groups. Twice as many African-American women as men applied to medical school, and black women accounted for nearly two-thirds of black students who were accepted and even-

tually matriculated. That disparity translates into graduation rates, with 63% of new black MDs in 2011 being women, the largest gender gap, in either direction, of any racial or ethnic group.

The AAMC report said the "persistent" problem of black male underrepresentation among applicants speaks to a need for medical schools, which have stepped up minority recruitment efforts in recent years, "to institute plans and initiatives aimed at strengthening the pipeline." Efforts include attempts to interest more black male youth in medicine and hiring more faculty members "from racially and ethnically underrepresented groups."

The gap seen among African-American men in medicine does not

start when students apply to medical school. About 3% of college graduates are black men. Nationally, 52% of male African-Americans earn high school diplomas, compared with 58% of male Hispanics and 78% of male non-Hispanic whites, said a September 2012 report published by the non-profit Schott Foundation for Public Education. For every black male physician, there are about 50 African-American men incarcerated at the federal, state or local levels, according to 2009 U.S. Justice Dept. data.

"This has huge implications," said Rahn K. Bailey, MD, president of the National Medical Assn., which promotes the interests of African-American physicians and patients. "We need everybody. We need all hands on deck." ♦