

More Minorities Enroll in Medical School in 2010

BY JANE ANDERSON

FROM A REPORT BY THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN MEDICAL COLLEGES

More minority students enrolled as first-year medical students in 2010, with Hispanic male medical students especially increasing their numbers, according to new data released Oct. 13 by the Association of American Medical Colleges.

The number of black/African American and American Indian first-year medical students also grew this year, and every U.S. region saw increases in medical school enrollment diversity, said AAMC President and CEO Dr. Darrell Kirch.

"The bottom line is, we see more minority students pursuing a career in medicine," Dr. Kirch said in a telephone press briefing to announce the findings.

Improved diversity will help communities meet their health needs, especially with the increased need for physicians triggered by the Affordable Care Act, he said.

"You don't improve the health of a community without having a workforce that reflects the diversity of that community," Dr. Kirch said, adding that it's not enough for health care reform to provide insurance if there aren't enough physicians. "An insurance card can't take care of you – you need to have a physician to do that."

Hispanic men increased their enrollment in medical school by 17.1%, while enrollment by Hispanic women grew by 1.6% over 2009, according to the AAMC report. Total Hispanic enrollment rose by 9%. First-year Hispanic enrollees in U.S. medical schools totaled 1,539 in 2010, compared with 1,412 in 2009, according to AAMC.

Black/African American enrollment, meanwhile, grew by 2.9% over 2009. A total of 1,350 black/African American

students enrolled in medical school as first-year students in 2010, compared with 1,312 students in 2009.

American Indian enrollment remained small, with just 191 first-year students in 2010, according to AAMC. However, that represented a 25% increase over last year's enrollment of 153 students, AAMC said.

Asian students also saw gains, with enrollment increasing 2.4% in

2010 to 4,214 from 4,114 in 2009, according to the AAMC report.

Overall, the level of applicants to U.S. medical schools has remained steady for at least the past 4 years, although the total number of first-time applications increased by 2.5% in 2010, said Dr. Kirch.

"Medical school remains a very compelling career choice," he said. About 42,000 potential students, including

31,063 first-time applicants, competed for about 18,000 openings, he said.

About 53% of applicants were male and 47% were female; men also outnumbered women first-year enrollees by 53% to 47%, the report showed.

One new medical school – the Virginia Tech Carilion Medical School – accepted its first class this year, and two more are in line to accept their first classes next year, Dr. Kirch said. Another seven medical schools are in the accreditation process, he said.

"This effort to expand medical school enrollment will enable us to add 7,000 more annual graduates," he said, adding, "we're not focused solely on new schools. We're also focused on [increasing enrollment at] existing schools."

But increased medical school enrollment won't help the looming shortage of physicians unless the number of residency slots also increases, Dr. Kirch warned.

AAMC advocates about a 15% increase in the number of residency slots, he said. ■



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Productivity, Ownership Linked

Billable work per patient appears to be increasing only at physician groups under the "private practice model," but expenses have also grown, according to a Medical Group Management Association study. Over the past 5 years, relative value units per patient rose by 13% at private medical practices but declined nearly 18% at practices owned by hospitals or integrated delivery systems, analysts found. Meanwhile, operating costs for private practices increased by nearly 2% last year, in contrast to a slight decline for practices owned by the larger entities. MGMA attributed part of the increase in expenses for private practices to the cost of implementing electronic health record systems. "In the private practice model, EHR incentives have provided a catalyst for practices to purchase systems and deploy electronic health records, therefore increasing the practice's information technology expenditures," said Kenneth Hertz, a principal with MGMA Health Care Consulting Group, in a statement.

California Limits CT Radiation

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) has signed a bill that limits the radiation dose provided in computed tomography scans. The new law comes in the wake of patients at at least six California hospitals having received up to eight times the normal radiation from their CT scans. Beginning in 2012, technicians must record the radiation dose from every scan, and radiology reports must include that information. Each year, a medical physicist will be required to confirm each CT machine's readings.

Beginning in 2013, medical imaging facilities need to report to the state any medical injury from CT radiation and any instance in which certain doses have been exceeded.

Hospital Care Is Improving

Hospitals have improved their care for heart attack victims, pneumonia and surgery patients, and children who have asthma, according to the Joint Commission. The group's annual report shows 8 years of continuous improvement on measures that produce the greatest positive impact on patient outcomes, according to the commission's report. For example, in 2009, hospitals provided evidence-based heart attack treatments such as aspirin at arrival and beta-blockers at discharge in 98% of encounters with the appropriate patients, up from 89% in 2002. Pneumonia patients in 2009 received evidence-based treatments about 93% of the time, compared with 72% in 2002. However, hospitals need to improve performance on two measures: providing fibrinolytic therapy to heart attack patients within 30 minutes of arrival and giving antibiotics to pneumonia patients in intensive care units within 24 hours, the Joint Commission said.

Giving Back to the DEA

Americans turned in more than 242,000 pounds of unused or unwanted prescription drugs for disposal as part of the first national prescription drug "Take-Back" campaign, the Drug Enforcement Administration said. The agency reported a huge turnout of people turning in large quantities of old drugs at more

than 4,000 disposal sites being run by law enforcement personnel around the country. For example, at one site a woman turned in nearly 50 years' worth of medications for disposal, while at another site a man brought in his kitchen drawer, full of medications, to dump, a DEA announcement said. "The Take-Back campaign was a stunning nationwide success [and] a crucial step toward reducing the epidemic of prescription drug abuse that is plaguing this nation," said DEA Acting Administrator Michele Leonhart in the announcement.

Reform Yields New Training Slots

Nearly 900 additional primary care physicians will be trained through \$167 million in new federal grants funded by the Affordable Care Act, according to the Department of Health and Human Services. The 5-year grants will go to 82 accredited training programs to increase the number of residents in general internal medicine, family practice, and general pediatrics. By 2015, about 500 more residents will have completed their training than would have done so under past funding, and more will still be in the pipeline, HHS said. Additional grants will expand training for physician assis-

tants and nurses, and will help low-income individuals enter and advance in health sector careers.

Nursing Report Spurs Controversy

Nurses' roles and responsibilities should change significantly to meet the increased demand for care created by health care reform, according to an Institute of Medicine report that immediately drew criticism from the American Medical Association. The report urged removal of regulatory and institutional obstacles to nurses taking on additional patient-care duties. To handle these new responsibilities, nurses should receive higher levels of training through an improved education system, including a new residency program and additional opportunities for lifelong learning, the institute report said. The AMA took issue with the report's call to expand nurses' scope of practice, saying that nurse practitioners don't have nearly the amount of training and clinical experience that doctors do. "With a shortage of both nurses and physicians, increasing the responsibility of nurses is not the answer to the physician shortage," said AMA board member Dr. Rebecca J. Patchin in a statement.

—Jane Anderson

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