

# Study: Med schools lack diversity

BY AMY THOMSON  
STAFF WRITER

Minorities are underrepresented nationwide in health care and medical schools, according to a report published by a medical policy group, but officials at many schools in North Carolina say they're doing a good job of recruiting a diverse group of students.

The Institute of Medicine's report, released Friday, indicated that although diversity in these educational areas benefits students and patients, current admissions policies in medical programs, among other things, are preventing minorities from entering the field.

"The numbers indicate we have a marked disparity in the number of minority health care personnel as compared with demographic numbers," said Lonnie R. Bristow, chairman of the committee that produced the report and carried out the two-year study on which it was based.

American Indians, blacks, Hispanics and some groups of Asians and Pacific Islanders were listed as being underrepresented in medical professions.

Blacks, for example, constitute 12 percent of the population but only 2 percent of medical personnel, Bristow said.

The reasons for the discrepancy vary. One problem, according to the report, is that not as many students from disadvantaged and minority groups make it into higher education. Cultural factors, impoverished school systems and low motivation all were listed as causes of the gap.

For these reasons, Bristow said, tests such as the Medical School Entrance Exam, which usually see lower scores for minorities, aren't necessarily a fair determination of a student's ability.

Instead, the committee concluded that schools should look more closely at the community involvement, leadership skills and compassion demonstrated by applicants.

Georgette Dent, associate dean for student affairs at the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Medicine, said the school already has made strides in increasing minority involvement compared with the rest of the state and nation.

The University boasts the nation's ninth highest percentage of black graduates from its medical programs and the fifth highest percentage of American Indian graduates, according to a 1998 survey by the Association of American Medical Colleges.

It also sponsors the Medical Education Development Program,

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—LONNIE R. BRISTOW, INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE

which focuses on recruiting disadvantaged and underrepresented minorities. Students come in during summer for what Dent called a "mini med school."

Dent said that the program has proven a good gauge for how well a student will perform in medical school and that its participants have gone on to be recruited by medical programs all over the United States.

East Carolina University and an affiliated school, the Brody School of Medicine, also claim to have minority-promoting programs already in place.

James Peden, associate dean of admissions for the school, said 21 percent to 24 percent of students accepted into the medical program are members of underrepresented groups. This year, exactly one of four were members of those groups.

But in the past few years, the percentage of minority applicants at Brody has dropped, he said, adding that he wasn't sure of the

cause. Brenda Armstrong, associate dean and director of medical school admissions at Duke University, said the drop-off in minority students is apparent across the country.

"There's not a whole lot of incentive for students to choose medicine," she said.

Loans are replacing student aid, she added, and scholarships are putting the long and costly education required for a medical degree out of reach for a "population that can't stand the losses."

Armstrong also said the pool of students bright enough to attend medical school is being reduced by recruitment from business schools.

Duke's medical school doesn't have a minority affairs office, but Armstrong said that's because it's not necessary. "Minority affairs (are) everyone's concern."

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