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Comments on “Mini-medical school programs decrease perceived barriers of pursuing medical careers among underrepresented minority high school students”

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To the Editor:

I commend the efforts made by Abdulrazzak et al. to identify barriers underrepresented minority (URM) high school students face when applying to medical school [1]. Although there is value in addressing the hardships students may encounter when contemplating a career in medicine, I’d like to expound upon the barriers present for URM medical students and residents in their training and how these barriers might be impeding diversity initiatives to increase minority representation.

There are multiple hardships in medical education encountered by minorities: microaggressions, a sense of lost identity, additional work assigned to URM residents to promote diversity on top of their clinical workload [2], discrimination, absence of minority networking opportunities, and a lack of both diverse and informed faculty who recognize minority issues [3]. As Abdulrazzak et al. noted, high school students perceive a lack of guidance and support as a barrier to considering medical school [1]. It becomes questionable how their barriers can be addressed if a similar, if not equivalent, issue exists for URM medical students and residents in training.

To create a work environment that is conducive to minority well-being seems achievable if change is made at the institutional level. Najibi et al. reported that physicians who were assigned to coach both URM and non-URM medical students failed to identify that the needs of their URM students were unique and different from their non-URM counterparts; contrastingly, the group of URM students who worked with these physicians experienced stress secondary to the lack of acknowledgement for the role identity plays in a minority student’s success [4]. Identity seems to be a key factor in minority well-being. Considering this as a factor that can impede minority success, when not addressed, could be the catalyst for needed change in the field.

Youmans et al. evaluated the impact a resident-led mentorship program for URM students had on the URM resident physician mentors [5]. It was found that mentors believed their work in the program addressed the challenge of underrepresentation in medicine; simultaneously, it also advanced their own academic interest, wellness, and confidence in mentorship [5]. These qualities could be significant in retaining minority physicians who are willing to provide guidance and representation for the future generation of students who apply and matriculate into medical school. Further research is needed on the barriers that URM medical students and residents experience in their training to ensure that a career field that younger URM students perceive as inspiring, inclusive, and empowering can be implemented.

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References


