Hospital-based, multidisciplinary, youth mentoring and medical exposure program positively influences and reinforces health care career choice: “The Reach One Each One Program early experience”

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ABSTRACT

Background: According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, underrepresented minorities (URMs) are more likely to leave science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields at higher rates than their peers during undergraduate studies. Many institutions of higher learning have implemented pipeline programs aimed at preparing and inspiring high school and college aged students in select careers in health sciences with varying levels of success. Research has shown that a health care workforce that mirrors the community they serve is more effective in reducing health disparities and increasing positive health outcomes. We hypothesize that a hospital-based, multidisciplinary youth mentoring and medical exposure program will enhance the decision of URM high school students to choose healthcare careers.

Materials and method: A retrospective analysis of the Reach One Each One Program (ROEO) was performed. ROEO is a hospital based, 11-week multidisciplinary youth mentoring and medical exposure program for inner-city high school students. The analysis was based on a phone survey of the twenty-six (26) seniors who completed the program and subsequently graduated from high school between May 2013 and May 2015 to assess the following: 1) College enrollment/attendance, 2) Health profession majors, and 3) Pre-med status. The study was approved by the Morehouse School of Medicine Institutional Review Board.

Results: Of the twenty-six students, 23 were female and 3 were male; 25 (96%) of the students were African American and one student was a Caucasian female. Twenty-four (92.3%) of the students were enrolled in college and 2 (7.7%) were scheduled to begin in the spring semester of 2016. Twenty-one of the 24 attending college at the time of the survey (87.5%) were enrolled in a health science degree program and 16 (66.7%) confirmed that they were enrolled in pre-medical (Pre-med) curriculum.

Conclusion: Hospital-based, multidisciplinary medical mentoring programs can have a positive impact on the lives and health care career decisions of aspiring URM high school students. Further study will be necessary to validate the most influential components needed for the success of such programs.

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diversity. This will be of vital importance as we move into the next phase of healthcare delivery.

To effectively eliminate healthcare disparities, AMCs will have to rethink traditional approaches to medical education. If we are ever going to improve and ultimately eliminate disparities in healthcare, greater efforts will need to be made to recruit learners and healthcare practitioners from diverse backgrounds earlier. We will need a workforce that comprehends and epitomizes inclusiveness and respect for diversity if health outcomes are truly going to be improved.2 Additionally, research supports the need to increase the numbers of racial and ethnic minorities that enter the health professions as they are more likely to treat minority patients or have offices located in medically underserved areas.4 With the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the initiation of value-based purchasing, patients now have greater freedom in choosing a health care system and their medical providers. In order to remain competitive in the modern healthcare environment, hospitals and the medical profession both will have to adjust to this new reality in the way we approach and recruit in academic medical training efforts. Modifications in the educational and training process that promote diversity and inclusion should be evident in the modern training paradigm from the earliest stages and spread far beyond the simple foundations of equity and fairness. Moreover, medical schools admissions processes, residency and faculty recruitment, and professional specialty training have to create and support a mission to diversify its student body.2

The Reach One Each One (ROEO) Program was created to address the shortage of underrepresented high school and future college students interested in health services careers. It is strongly believed these types of grass roots programs, which focus on pipeline initiatives to cultivate culturally sensitive, patient centered care providers, will improve diversity and help reduce health care disparities associated with care delivery in the future. The ROEO program was developed within the Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM) Division of Trauma and Surgical Critical Care and in partnership with colleagues in Emory School of Medicine’s Department of Emergency Medicine, Emory Center for Injury Control, as well as other colleagues within the Grady Health System Trauma Program. In the MSM Department of Surgery, we believed that structured exposure to healthcare professionals in the proper clinical setting could positively influence early decisions to pursue careers in medicine for motivated high school students with a strong interest in the STEM areas of study.

The ROEO youth mentoring and medical exposure program has had a positive impact on its participants. In addition to helping the students to fulfill the core objectives of the program, the student participants are also taken on a medical school tour to learn more about the admissions process. In addition, the participants have the opportunity to directly interact with medical students in both the clinical setting and basic sciences as well as surgical faculty and residents, hospital personnel and administrative staff from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities and genders. The final session consists of a financial literacy seminar to begin teaching them better stewardship of their future finances. The last session culminates in a graduation and awards ceremony in which each participant receives a certificate of program completion and a white cloth jacket with their names monogrammed on it. The ROEO program has 5 principle objectives, which are listed below.

1. To facilitate interaction with physicians, medical students, hospital personnel, and mentors to assist their pursuit in healthcare careers.
2. To expose students to various medical subspecialties, medical technology, and trauma care with an emphasis on violence & injury prevention, driving safety, and future opportunities as physician and ancillary professionals in the healthcare field.
3. To educate participants on how to matriculate through undergraduate studies, fulfill the pre-medical requirements, and ultimately get accepted into medical school.
4. To stimulate interest in careers in surgery and medicine to care for socioeconomically disadvantaged patients in Georgia and throughout the nation.
5. To help underrepresented high school students determine if pursuing a career in medicine as a physician or non-physician healthcare provider or personnel is the correct career path for them.

These core objectives were effectively met through our collaborative hospital-based, multidisciplinary youth mentoring and medical exposure endeavor undertaken by Morehouse and Emory University School of Medicine academic faculty practicing at Grady Memorial Hospital, one of the largest public academic hospitals in the nation. ROEO was designed to encourage local high school adolescents from diverse backgrounds who are interested in science, technology, and mathematics to carefully consider career opportunities in the health care field. The program’s main objective is to stimulate interest in healthcare as a career choice for under-represented high school students with an emphasis on preparing them to provide culturally sensitive care in the future. Didactic sessions were conducted on how to matriculate through college and medical school, the prerequisite curriculum, and career opportunities in the field of healthcare in addition to multilevel exposure to students and practitioners in different fields.

The future healthcare delivery system has forever been changed. As such, greater efforts will need to be made to teach healthcare trainees and students the importance of embracing inclusiveness with respect for diversity.5 As the demographics of the nation are rapidly changing, the necessity for greater diversity in the health care environment is becoming ever more apparent, particularly as the gap in health care disparities continues to widen.6,7 As trends in underrepresented minorities (URM) matriculating in U.S. medical schools, schools of public health, and the allied health professions institutes over recent times suggest, continued challenges in access for and graduation of qualified applicants persists. Consequently, pipeline programs that help to cultivate higher numbers of URM to matriculate as health professional students will be of vital importance to help produce a diverse national training environment and successfully address some of the underlying issues surrounding health disparities.8 In addition, there is compelling evidence that supports the fact that improved diversity can enhance access and quality of care. Therefore, a great sense of urgency has emerged to assure that diverse perspectives and opinions permeate every aspect of the higher education environment.9 Consequently, youth mentoring and health care observation programs such as ROEO may provide a means of early exposure of these future healthcare providers to help shape their minds and influence cultural perspectives to ultimately meet the needs of medically underserved patients and positively impact the health of minority communities.10

These challenges are becoming more of an issue as healthcare inequalities and health inequity have gained greater appreciation and understanding. Data supports that economically disadvantaged patients have had disproportionate access to health services.11 Disproportional access leads to greater disparities in health service delivery, which further compromises every aspect of the healthcare system. This has been well documented and shown to lead to significantly poorer outcomes in underrepresented members of our society.11 Consequently, greater efforts are needed now
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