

# FOREWORD

---

## INCREASING DIVERSITY IN THE BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES AND HEALTH PROFESSIONS: THE NIDDK NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT SUMMER RESEARCH PROGRAM

Keith C. Norris, MD; Lawrence Y. Agodoa, MD

A key component of addressing not only health disparities in disadvantaged populations, but also the overall health of our nation, is the recognized need to increase the quantity and quality of women and racial/ethnic minority investigators committed to performing high-quality research and delivering high-quality healthcare.<sup>1</sup> Future health science researchers and health professionals will need to be well-equipped to integrate emerging advances in basic science, behavioral sciences, and clinical trials to advance evidence-based health care. Early exposure of a diverse pool of young students with a high level of interest and deep passion for biomedical research may help to address this need. The Sullivan Commission on Diversity in the Healthcare Workforce was convened in April 2003 to address the paucity of minorities in health professions that exist despite America's increasingly diverse population.<sup>2</sup> The Commission reported its findings in the *Missing Persons: Minorities in the Health Professions* report, emphasizing the need to provide a diversity of opportunities to minority students interested in the health professions.

The National Institutes of Health has developed several programs to stimulate interest in biomedical scientists at an early stage. The National High School Student Summer Research Program (NHSSSRP), now 12 years old, is highlighted in this issue of *Ethnicity and Disease*. Designed to provide a robust summer research experience for promising high school students who ordinarily might not have the opportunity, the program helps prepare students with an interest in NIDDK mission areas for college and beyond. By providing young students with an opportunity to perform systematic investigations in a team science environment, the NHSSSRP combines scientific rigor with enthusiasm and an

understanding of compassion, ethics, and fairness needed to create effective teams of science.

One of the premises behind the NHSSSRP is that developing scientists and physicians from diverse backgrounds, brings unique perspectives, approaches and insights to research questions, the research team and the field of science/medicine. Our country's academic, research, and health communities need a steady influx of competent and sensitive individuals to sustain innovation, excellence, and a competitive edge on the evolving threats of disease and health maintenance.<sup>3</sup> A key to the program's success has been the faculty mentoring, providing inspiration and academic enrichment in the sciences by linking promising young students with established researchers and supporting them to perform high-quality research. A carefully structured mentoring program can ignite the excitement of discovery through research and awaken an interest among students who might not otherwise choose to pursue scientific studies, nurturing the natural inclinations among promising youth to pursue the fields of study that interest them most. As an added incentive for participants in the program they are invited to the NIH campus for a workshop in which they share their accomplishments and form peer networks.

The student and mentors were encouraged to prepare the manuscripts that are contained in this issue of the supplement to the journal *Ethnicity and Disease*. Due to the limited time period for the program, these manuscripts are not traditional peer-reviewed publications, but represent a first step for many toward participation in the rigors and enjoyment of scientific communication. We congratulate the students and mentors who have contributed the manuscripts to this issue and look forward to future issues.

---

From the Department of Medicine, Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science and UCLA School of Medicine, Los Angeles, California (KCN); and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland (LYA).

Address correspondence to Keith C. Norris, MD; Charles R. Drew University, 11705 Deputy Yamamoto Place, Suite B; Lynwood, CA 90262. 323-249-5711. keithnorris@cdrewu.edu

### REFERENCES

1. Smedley BD, Stith Butler A, Bristow LR, eds. *In the Nation's Compelling Interest: Ensuring Diversity in the Health Care Workforce*. Washington, DC: Institute of Medicine: National Academies Press. 2004. Available at: <http://www.nap.edu/books/030909125X/html/>. Last accessed: 10/16/07.
2. The Sullivan Commission. *Missing Persons: Minorities in the Health Profession*. Atlanta, GA: Morehouse School of Medicine. 2004. Available at: [www.aacn.nche.edu/Media/pdf/SullivanReport.pdf](http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Media/pdf/SullivanReport.pdf). Last accessed: 10/16/07.
3. Kao J. *Innovation Nation: How America Is Losing Its Innovation Edge, Why It Matters, and What We Can Do to Get It Back*. Free Press. 2007.