

FOREWORD

NIDDK AND THE MINORITY BIOMEDICAL PIPELINE

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Increasing the nation's cadre of minority clinicians and researchers is a crucial component to providing the opportunity to maintain a high level of scientific productivity and effective medical advances.¹ The nation's biomedical doctoral programs and medical, nursing and dental schools continue to fall short in attaining greater diversity among their students. This contributes to disparities across race/ethnicity in the nation's biomedical and health profession workforce. Recently, the Sullivan Commission on Diversity in the Healthcare Workforce reinforced the need to provide a diversity of opportunities to minority students interested in the health professions.² As part of the strategic plan on minority health disparities, the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) has developed a series of programs aimed at increasing underrepresented minority health professionals, with a focus in biomedical research. An effort with high school students began in 1995 at the suggestion of Dr. John Ruffin, director, Office of Research in Minority Health (ORMH). The premier program emerged as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Howard University Minority High School Summer Research Program. The eight-week program accommodated 26 students from 13 states.

Over a 12-year period, the program expanded to encompass 75 students from around the country including Alaska, Hawaii

and Puerto Rico while still holding true to its original mission of providing underrepresented minority students with meaningful exposure to scientific research. In 2007, the program transitioned to become the NIDDK STEP-UP High School Program, a national student research and education program under the coordination of Charles Drew University of Medicine and Science; the University of Hawaii, Manoa; and the University of California, San Francisco, in coordination with the NIDDK. The goal remains to expose underrepresented minority and disadvantaged students to research now with a focus in the NIDDK mission areas including diabetes, endocrinology, metabolism, nutrition, obesity, and digestive, liver, urologic, kidney, and hematologic diseases. The long-term goal is to increase the number of underrepresented minority and disadvantaged students in the pipeline who are committed to a career in biomedical, behavioral, clinical, or social science research in the NIDDK mission areas.

Given the present academic environment where Hispanic (11%) and African American (17%) students are much less likely to graduate from a four-year college than White students (30%), pipeline programs like the NIDDK STEP-UP High School Program can provide mentorship, inspiration and academic enrichment these students need to achieve success.

Foreword

A special incentive for students in the program includes the opportunity to participate in a symposium on the NIH campus during which they share their work and accomplishments as well as form peer networks. The work of the students and the dedicated mentors is contained in this Supplement to *Ethnicity & 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 manuscripts to this issue and look forward to future issues.

REFERENCE

1. Institute of Medicine (IOM). *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Healthcare*. Smedley BD, Stith AY, Nelson AR, eds. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. 2003.
2. Sullivan L. Missing Persons: Minorities in the Health Profession. Available at: www.sullivancommission.org. Accessed on April 18, 2009.