

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

HEALTH CAREERS FOR RACIAL/ETHNIC MINORITIES: PLANTING THE SEEDS EARLY IN THE PIPELINE

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To the Editor:

Exposure is key to begin conceptualizing one's career objectives. I was therefore extremely excited to read the recent article in *Ethnicity and Disease* by Srinivasan and colleagues¹ that provided an overview of the Jackson Heart Study research-training program at Tougaloo College, an historically black college and university (HBCU). This program prepares racial/ethnic minority high school, undergraduate, and graduate students for health careers. I am impressed by this training program and believe that other universities, particularly minority-serving institutions, should glean important information from this program for minority career development, especially for health and health-related careers.

The paucity of racial/ethnic minority health professionals² underscores the exigent need for more racial/ethnic minorities in health fields. Health-related research training, coursework, and internships are indispensable steps in *planting the seeds early in the pipeline* to encourage racial/ethnic high school and undergraduate students to pursue health careers. At the very least, exposure to research offers important advantages for graduate studies. I truly believe that to solve the pervasive problem of health inequalities,³ racial/ethnic minorities are needed to join efforts of thinking critically about determinants of and solutions for myriad inequities.⁴ Further, racial/ethnic minority students need to be exposed to a plethora of health careers. Most high achieving students in math and science, however, are usually steered to become physicians. Having a broad range of expertise will be an essential tool for health disparities reduction. Moreover, dedicated and experienced mentors are vital resources for students. For all these reasons, I

applaud this training program for exposing students at various levels to health careers.

The impetus for this letter comes from my personal experience. I am a recent graduate of Morehouse College, an HBCU, where I participated in undergraduate research-training programs sponsored by agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. I am presently a graduate student at Harvard School of Public Health. I firmly believe that exposure made the difference for me in charting my career trajectory. Additionally, dedicated and experienced mentors provided guidance and nurturance. While similar undergraduate research-training programs exist, many more are needed for racial/ethnic minority students. Although this is an era of limited funding, and important programs are being cut or in jeopardy of being cut, there needs to be more government funding for such programs. I urge policymakers to maintain, if not increase, the level of funding for undergraduate training for racial/ethnic minorities.

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