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Boston University School of Medicine News



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INCREASE IN NUMBER OF MINORITY PHYSICIANS AIM OF NEW PROGRAM

An unprecedented effort to increase the number of black and other minority physicians through a partnership between the Boston University School of Medicine and the four colleges of the the Atlanta University Center in Georgia was announced today. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation of Princeton, New Jersey, has awarded a \$454,000 grant to Boston University to implement the new program that could become a model for other medical schools across the country.

"The national shortage of minority physicians is expected to reach a crisis stage in the next two decades," said Boston University School of Medicine Dean, John I. Sandson, M.D. "By the year 2000, the ratio of black physicians to the black population will be less than one half that of white physicians to the white population. We hope to develop a program that will assist in correcting this imbalance."

Details of the program, known as the Early Medical School Selection Program for minority students, were disclosed at a news conference at the Plaza Hotel in New York City prior to a meeting of Boston University School of Medicine New York area alumni.

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Early Medical School Selection/22222

John R. Silber, Ph.D., Boston University president, told the news session that "the decline in minority enrollment has been a problem for all medical schools. Reversing the trend will require extraordinary, cooperative efforts by medical educators, minority leaders and undergraduate colleges. Boston University is fully committed to this effort."

Representatives of the Atlanta University Center, composed of Clark College, Spelman College, Morris Brown College and Morehouse College, all in the Atlanta area, attended the press conference today. Inspiration for the program, they said, came from the experience of the late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who attended Morehouse College before receiving his doctorate in theology from Boston University in 1955. Other minority colleges are expected to join the partnership in the future.

"A higher priority must be given to medical education for blacks, Hispanics, Mexican-Americans and American Indians," said Louis Sullivan, M.D., president and dean of Morehouse School of Medicine and an alumnus and former faculty member of Boston University School of Medicine. "One way to address this issue is for medical schools to develop partnerships with black colleges and other schools with significant numbers of minority students."

"The shortage of black health professionals," Dr. Sullivan said, "is the result of a lingering legacy of decades of segregation and discrimination resulting in unequal educational opportunities, and particularly of barriers to health profession education for black Americans."

The program will function in the following manner:

- Five sophomore graduates attending Atlanta Center University institutions are being chosen to enter the program in Boston this summer. Additional students will participate in subsequent years.

- These students will take special courses, developed with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant, that combine elements of both science and liberal arts programs offered at both the undergraduate and medical school levels.

Early Medical School Selection/33333

- The courses will be designed to meet the special needs of students who will attend medical school.
- The Atlanta Center students will study in Boston in the summers following their sophomore and junior years and throughout their senior year of undergraduate college.
- In this manner, it is expected that the students will be better able to make the transition between undergraduate and medical school, where the first year is considered particularly difficult. They would be better equipped to master the medical school curriculum and thereby enhance their prospects for successful completion of their medical education.

A 1983 report of the Association of Minority Health Professions Schools stated that, although blacks represented 11.7 percent of the population in the U.S. in 1980, they made up only 2.6 percent of all physicians. Between 1950 and 1980, the ratio of black physicians increased by only 0.5 percent, from 2.1 percent to 2.6 percent.

"The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation considers the shortage of minority enrollment in medical schools to be a serious problem in health care," said Ruby P. Hearn, Ph.D., vice president of the Foundation. "We are enthusiastic about the potential for this partnership between Boston University School of Medicine and the consortium of undergraduate schools to increase the number of minority physicians."

"We look upon this relationship with Boston University School of Medicine as an important step forward," said Donald M. Stewart, Ph.D., president of Spelman College, a college for black women. "This new program will give our young women an increased advantage in enhancing their opportunities." Similar endorsements were expressed by Henrie Turner, Ph.D., premedical advisor at Morris Brown College and by Isabella Finkelstein, Ph.D., professor and premedical advisor at Clark College.

Boston University School of Medicine has for many years been recognized as a leader in adopting innovative pathways to medical education. Under the leadership of Sandson and Assistant Dean Arthur J. Culbert, Ph.D., the School has been able to knock down some of the barriers that traditionally separate undergraduate programs and medical school programs by successfully integrating the two faces of education in the late stages of the undergraduate curriculum.

In 1977, Boston University School of Medicine initiated the Modular Medical Integrated Curriculum (MMEDIC) program, which has become one of three pathways for students to obtain both the BA and MD degrees. By bringing together the faculties of Boston University's College of Liberal Arts and School of Medicine, new curriculum modules were formed for pre-med students that offered them major benefits. The curriculum modules not only offered better preparation in both the natural and social sciences, but also reduced the stress often associated with premedical curriculum courses. Admission to the MMEDIC program includes explicit acceptance into medical school. Moreover, the first year of medical school, traditionally one of high pressure and stress for students, is decompressed, allowing more time for leisure and work study projects.

"The Early Selection Program for minority students is a natural outgrowth of our earlier work with alternate pathways to medical education," said Culbert, who will serve as program director. "For some years, we have been concerned about giving every able student the opportunity to mature intellectually and socially while participating in a pre-medical curriculum that is not overly oppressive. By developing modular courses in biochemistry and the other medical sciences and implementing smaller classes and diverse instructional methods, I believe we have given some students the opportunity to become excellent physicians who might not otherwise have been able to take advantage of this opportunity."