AMA to aim for more diverse, better prepared physician workforce

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Brendan Murphy
News Writer

Less than 10 percent of physicians are black, American Indian, Alaska Native or Hispanic, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). That share stands in stark contrast to national demographics.

Delegates at the 2017 AMA Annual Meeting adopted several policies to promote diversity in the physician workforce and improve cultural competency and awareness among physicians.

Among them was a resolution asking the AMA to be proactive in cultivating a more diverse physician workforce. Delegates adopted policy to encourage medical-school admissions offices to use “holistic assessments” of applicants, to take into consideration “the diversity of preparation and the variety of talents that applicants bring to their education.”

Delegates also directed the AMA to:

- Develop an internal education program for its members on the issues and possibilities involved in creating a diverse physician population.
- Provide online educational materials for its membership that address diversity issues in patient care including, but not limited to, culture, religion, race and ethnicity.
- Create and support programs that introduce elementary through high school students, especially those from groups that are underrepresented in medicine (URM), to health care careers.
- Create and support pipeline programs and encourage support services for URM college students that will support them as they move through college, medical school and residency programs.

Other actions

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Between 2002 and 2016 the total number of U.S. medical school graduates increased by 27 percent, according to the AAMC. In 2016, however, only 142 medical school matriculates were Native American. That number is down from 156 in 2002. Delegates directed the AMA to join with the AAMC and other organizations to examine the downward trend in greater depth, and upon completion of the study, propose potential remedies.

With the intention of equipping physicians to treat physicians from all backgrounds, the House of Delegates approved an amendment to current policy. The addition calls for increased diversity in standardized patient programs, which feature mock diagnoses of lay people portraying patients.

A pool of standardized patients that is more representative of real-life patient diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, disability and more helps provide “a means of combining knowledge of health disparities and practice of cultural competence with clinical skills,” says the new policy.

Read more news coverage from the 2017 AMA Annual Meeting.