How a record-setting gift will help tomorrow’s Black physicians

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Brendan Murphy
News Writer

A recent donation from Bloomberg Philanthropies aims to combat health inequities by creating more Black physicians. The donation is part of a four-year, $100 million fund for students attending the nation’s four historically Black medical schools: Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, Charles R. Drew University of Medicine in Los Angeles, Howard University College of Medicine in Washington, D.C., and Meharry Medical College in Nashville.

Morehouse School of Medicine is a member school of AMA Accelerating Change in Medical Education Consortium.

The donation is the largest aggregate gift to historically Black medical schools from a single source, and it comes during a pandemic in which Black Americans are more likely to contract COVID-19 than any other demographic group.

“This historic investment in the Morehouse School of Medicine will lift the crushing burden of student debt and empower our graduates to take on the systemic racial inequities and injustice that have been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic,” said Morehouse School of Medicine President and Dean Valerie Montgomery Rice, MD. “These dollars will help free up future doctors to immediately head to the front lines and save Black lives while also improving health care access, equity, and quality for everyone.”

The record-setting gift is an “investment in health equity,” Dr. Montgomery Rice said.

Learn how medical schools and residency programs can diversify the workforce.

Physicians who resemble their patients

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Data indicates that when physicians share a racial background with their patients, health outcomes improve. In some communities, finding physicians that resemble the bulk of their patient populations can be a challenge.

In 2019, 6.2% of 2019 medical school graduates were Black, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges. That compares unfavorably with the U.S. population at large, 12% of whom are Black.

Bloomberg Philanthropies’ donation will go a long way toward addressing the cost barrier that prevents some disadvantaged students from attending medical school. At Morehouse, the funds will be used to cut medical student-loan debt for Black students currently enrolled and receiving financial aid.

Each student will get about $100,000 in tuition aid. Students currently in years two, three, and four of medical school will receive retroactive scholarships of roughly $25,000 per year through their graduations.

Find out why this Black medical resident, a grandfather, worked many years as mechanic.

Why physician diversity’s a priority

The AMA is looking to address physician diversity on several fronts. The AMA Accelerating Change in Medical Education Consortium has worked with Morehouse and other member medical schools to share strategies for enhancing recruitment, fostering viable pathways into medicine, promoting holistic admissions processes and creating inclusive learning environments, with the ultimate goal of generating a physician population that more closely resembles that of the nation.

The group has shared a process of institutional diversity and inclusion self-study and issued a statement to protect diverse learners during educational disruptions related to COVID-19. The AMA Doctors Back to School™ program also aims to increase the number of minority physicians and work toward eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities. The program sends minority physicians and medical students into the community as a way to introduce children to professional role models and show kids of all ages from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups that a career in medicine is attainable for everyone.

Launched last year, the AMA Center for Health Equity has a mandate to embed health equity across the organization so that health equity becomes part of the practice, process, action, innovation and organizational performance and outcomes.