What the newest medical class looks like

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More students are going to medical school than ever before, and the newest matriculants are the most diverse class yet, according to data from the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC).

The number of students who enrolled in U.S. allopathic medical schools for the first time in 2014 reached a new high of 20,343, and the total number of medical school applicants also rose to a record 49,480.
2014 medical school enrollment increases

- All natriculants: 1.4%
- Hispanic, Latino or of Spanish origin: 1.8%
- Black or African American: 1.1%
- American Indian or Alaska Native: 17%
New race and ethnicity reporting options updated in 2013 offered applicants and enrollees a different way to self-report their background. Since the reporting change, data show progress in the diversity of the nation’s medical students, including:

- A 1.1 percent increase in the number of African American enrollees, from 1,396 to 1,412
- A 1.8 percent increase in the number of Hispanic or Latino enrollees, from 1,826 to 1,859
- A 17 percent increase in American Indian and Alaska Native enrollees, from 173 to 202

The AAMC changed the methodology “to more accurately reflect just how diverse our society is and to give students the flexibility they wanted in self-identifying,” Darrell G. Kirch, MD, president and CEO of AAMC, said on a recent call. “We feel that the methodology we’re using has significantly improved and is responsive to the realities of diversity in America now.”

For example, applicants and matriculants now can choose more than one race or ethnicity. They may also identify as “unknown” or “non-U.S.”

Gender makeup of those entering medical school this year remained mostly unchanged. About 52 percent of enrollees are males, and nearly 48 percent are females.

A broader picture of applicants

Three-quarters of this year’s crop of applicants have research experience, and more than three-quarters reported volunteer community service in some kind of health care setting.

“Our medical schools have been making strong efforts to look at applicants in a manner we call ‘holistically,’” Dr. Kirch said. “What are their personal attributes, and what do they bring to us on the diversity front—not just racial and ethnic diversity but experiential diversity.”

The overall grade point average of 3.5 and average MCAT score of 29 is mostly unchanged from prior years’ applicants, the data shows.

Osteopathic enrollees increase

Meanwhile, medical student enrollment in U.S. osteopathic medical schools increased by 5.2 percent over 2013 enrollment, with 6,786 students enrolling this year, according to the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine.
Most of this growth is attributed to one new osteopathic medical school and two additional teaching locations enrolling their first classes this fall: Liberty University College of Osteopathic Medicine in Lynchburg, Virginia; Ohio University Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine Dublin Campus in Dublin, Ohio; and Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine–New York, Middletown Campus in Middletown, New York.

A changing environment

“Medicine as a career is, and continues to be, a very strong and attractive career choice for the best and brightest of our students,” Dr. Kirch said.

This year’s enrollees also likely will see different medical school environments, Dr. Kirch said. “We’re not educating doctors simply to work in the current health care system. But more and more, we’re trying to focus that education on the skills and competencies that they’ll need in the future.”

The AMA’s Accelerating Change in Medical Education initiative is playing a role in shaping the future medical school curriculum. Through a consortium of 11 medical schools, the initiative spent the last year developing and implementing innovative ideas such as competency-based education, adaptive learning, and teachings in systems-based practice and team-based care. Read more about the changing face of undergraduate medical education at AMA Wire®.