

Minority Medical School Enrollment Up in 2010

BY JANE ANDERSON

FROM A REPORT BY THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN MEDICAL COLLEGES

More minority students enrolled as first-year medical students in 2010, with Hispanic male medical students especially increasing their numbers, new data show.

The number of black/African American and American Indian first-year medical students also grew this year, and every U.S. region saw increases in medical school enrollment diversity, said AAMC President and CEO Darrell Kirch.

"The bottom line is, we see more minority students pursuing a career in medicine," Dr. Kirch said in a telephone press briefing to announce the findings.

Improved diversity will help communities meet their health needs, especially with the increased need for physicians triggered by the Affordable Care Act. "You don't improve the health of a community without having a workforce that reflects the diversity of that community," Dr. Kirch said, adding that it's not enough for health care reform to provide insurance if there aren't enough physicians. "An insurance card can't take care of you – you need to have a physician to do that."

Hispanic men increased their enrollment in medical school by 17.1%, while enrollment by Hispanic women grew by 1.6% over 2009, according to the AAMC report. Total Hispanic enrollment rose by 9%. First-year Hispanic

enrollees in U.S. medical schools totaled 1,539 in 2010, compared with 1,412 in 2009, according to AAMC.

Black/African American enrollment, meanwhile, grew by 2.9% over 2009. A total of 1,350 black/African American students enrolled in medical school as first-year students in 2010, compared with 1,312 students in 2009. Asian students also saw gains, with enrollment increasing 2.4% in 2010 to 4,214 from 4,114 in 2009, according to the AAMC report.

Overall, the level of applicants to U.S. medical schools has remained steady for at least the past 4 years, although the total number of first-time applications increased by 2.5% in 2010, said Dr. Kirch.

"Medical school remains a very compelling career choice," he said. About 42,000 potential students, including 31,063 first-time applicants, competed for about 18,000 openings, he said.

About 53% of applicants were male and 47% were female; men also outnumbered women first-year enrollees by 53% to 47%, the report showed.

One new medical school – the Virginia Tech Carilion Medical School – accepted its first class this year, and two more are in line to accept their first classes next year, Dr. Kirch said. Another seven medical schools are in the accreditation process, he said.

"This effort to expand medical school enrollment will enable us to add 7,000 more annual graduates," he said, adding, "we're not focused solely on new schools. We're also focused on [increasing enrollment at] existing schools." ■

Health Reform Law Could Benefit Millions of Women

BY NASEEM S. MILLER

As many as 30 million women could benefit from the health reform law over the next decade, according to an analysis of the Affordable Care Act by the Commonwealth Fund. This includes up to 15 million women without health insurance who could get subsidized coverage; 14.5 million insured women who will benefit from improved coverage or reduced premiums; and an estimated 100,000 uninsured women who could gain coverage under the Pre-Existing Condition Insurance Plan.

The study authors said that although women are as likely as men to be uninsured, their health care needs leave them more vulnerable to high health care costs and they are more likely to lose their health insurance. According to the study, insurance carriers consider women, especially those of child-bearing age, to be at a higher risk than men. In addition, it said, most policies sold on the individual market will not cover the cost of preg-

nancy. Women also are more likely to delay their care and to be more central in coordinating health care for their families.

Although this is good news for women across the country, the question remains whether there will be enough physicians to provide care for them.

The shortage of physicians in the United States is documented through dozens of studies by organizations such as the Association of American Medical Colleges, in addition to several states.

As for the ACA, some of the provisions that benefit women started in September 2010. Others, such as expansion of Medicaid eligibility and new state insurance exchange with premium and cost-sharing subsidies of up to 400% of federal poverty level, will go into effect after 2014.

The report, "Realizing Health Reform's Potential: Women and the Affordable Care Act of 2010" is the first in a series by the Commonwealth Fund focusing on how health reform will affect various groups and populations. ■



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DSM-5 Field Trials Begin

The fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) is getting its first real-world trial at 11 large medical centers and among nearly 4,000 mental health professionals, the American Psychiatric Association has announced. The field trials will test whether proposed diagnostic criteria are understandable and easy for practitioners to use, accurately describe psychiatric problems, and yield consistent diagnoses. Psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and psychiatric/mental health nurses will test the new criteria by using them repeatedly to evaluate new and existing patients. After this testing phase, the manual will undergo a second round of public comment, editing, and more field trials lasting into 2012. "It is important that the proposed diagnostic criteria are subjected to rigorous and empirically sound field trials before DSM-5 is published in 2013," Dr. David Kupfer, DSM-5 Task Force chair, said in a statement.

Grants Fund Lupus Research

The Lupus Foundation of America has made six new grants for studies into what it considers neglected areas of lupus research: pediatric lupus, reproductive health issues in lupus, lupus nephritis, and neuropsychiatric lupus. "The research funded this year tackles some of the most complex and challenging areas of lupus research," said Sandra C. Raymond, president and CEO of the Washington-based foundation. "These areas of research have suffered from a lack of resources, and in some cases have seen little advancement." With the new grants, Dr. Bruce C. Richardson of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor will study the genetics of male lupus; Dr. Richard K. Burt of Northwestern University in Chicago will look at hematopoietic stem cell transplantation in lupus; Dr. Richard J. Quigg of the University of Chicago will study complement manipulation in lupus nephritis; Dr. Martin G. Pomper of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Baltimore will assess imaging microglial activation in neuropsychiatric lupus; Dr. Michelle A. Petri of Johns Hopkins will study the use of levothyroxine in pregnant systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) patients; and Dr. Kathleen M. O'Neil of the University of Oklahoma in Oklahoma City will look at the effect of puberty on SLE.

Giving Back to the DEA

Americans turned in more than 242,000 pounds of unused or unwanted prescription drugs for disposal as part of the first national pre-

scription drug "Take-Back" campaign, the Drug Enforcement Administration reports. The agency reported a huge turnout of people turning in large quantities of old drugs at more than 4,000 disposal sites being run by law enforcement personnel across the country. For example, at one site a woman turned in nearly 50 years' worth of medications for disposal, while at another site, a man dumped a kitchen drawer full of medications, a DEA announcement said. "The Take-Back campaign was a stunning nationwide success [and] a crucial step toward reducing the epidemic of prescription drug abuse that is plaguing this nation," said DEA Acting Administrator Michele Leonhart in the announcement.

IOM Backs Nursing Expansion

The roles and responsibilities of nurses should change significantly to meet the increased demand for care created by health care reform, according to an Institute of Medicine report that immediately drew criticism from the American Medical Association. The report urged removal of regulatory and institutional obstacles that prevent nurses from taking on additional patient-care duties. To handle these new responsibilities, nurses should receive higher levels of training through an improved educational system, including a new residency program and additional opportunities for lifelong learning, the institute report said. The AMA took issue with the report's call to expand nurses' scope of practice, saying that nurses do not have nearly the amount of training and clinical experience that doctors do. "With a shortage of both nurses and physicians, increasing the responsibility of nurses is not the answer to the physician shortage," AMA board member Rebecca J. Patchin said in a statement.

New Rules Target Fraud

The Department of Health and Human Services has proposed new rules aimed at fighting waste, fraud, and abuse in Medicare, Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). The rules are authorized by the Affordable Care Act and would tighten screening of providers wishing to bill government programs for services, for example, by using broader criminal background checks and even fingerprinting. The rules also require states to terminate from their Medicaid and CHIP programs any provider who has been thrown out of Medicare or another state's health programs. The proposed rule asked for advice on how best to ensure provider compliance.

—From staff reports