Medical Schools Boast Biggest Enrollment Ever

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The number of students entering medical school this fall—17,759—is the largest ever, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges.

Although that number represents only a 2.3% increase from the previous year, there was an 8% increase in applicants, with 42,300 seeking to enter medical school in 2007. It was the fourth consecutive year in which the number of applicants was on the rise, after a 6-year decline.

In a press briefing, Darrell G. Kirch, AAMC president, said the increase in applicants and enrollees shows "the interest in medicine runs very strong in our country."

Applicants and enrollees are more diverse than ever, according to the AAMC. Although the number of applicants who identified themselves as white or white combined with another ethnicity—26,916—still dwarfs other races, there was an increase in the number of minority applicants. There were 2,999 applicants who identified themselves as Latino or Hispanic alone or in combination with another race, 3,471 African American/combination applicants, and 9,225 Asian/combination applicants.

The number of black and Hispanic male applicants rose by 9.2%, which was larger than the growth of the overall applicant pool, according to the association. Black male acceptance and enrollment increased by 5.3%, and Hispanic male acceptance remained even with 2006 levels. There was an almost-even split among men and women applicants and enrollees. Men slightly edged out women, accounting for 51% of applicants and 51.7% of enrollees.

The AAMC and other groups have warned of looming physician shortages. Depending on the estimates used, there will be a shortfall of 55,000-90,000 physicians across all specialties by 2020. The AAMC has pushed for a 30% increase in enrollment by 2015, said Dr. Kirch. ■