Hispanic Physician Group Aims to Develop Leaders

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WASHINGTON — Two programs sponsored by the National Hispanic Medical Association aim to train more Hispanics to become physicians and to help them become leaders in the health care system.

First, the association has partnered with Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tenn., a historically black medical school, to recruit Hispanic students for the college.

"We are all communities of color and we have to band together," John Maupin Jr., D.D.S., president of Meharry, said at a meeting sponsored by the National Hispanic Medical Association (NHMA). "We need to be for individuals of color and individuals from poor communities of all races."

At the meeting, representatives from Meharry and NHMA signed a memorandum of understanding, which establishes a relationship between the two organizations to expand outreach to Hispanic students. The project involves creating a model joint mentoring program, offering a summer research opportunity to a select number of potential students, and establishing a regional interview program that provides an opportunity for NHMA medical volunteers to interview students—through teleconferencing or other means—who have applied to Meharry.

"Together we ought to be able to help any number of individuals who have the opportunity to go to Meharry," Dr. Maupin said. "I want to reach out, Meharry wants to reach out. If we come together and execute this endeavor, we'll be able to find these students."

NHMA President Dr. Elena Rios called the memorandum "historic." "The historically black colleges and universities of this country and the black professional world are light years ahead of the Hispanics," she said.

"We have Hispanics serving all professions. We just don't have the boards of trustees and boards of directors that are Hispanic at our universities in this country. For the [historically black colleges and universities] to take their vision and include us, and for us to say we want to work together, this is history in the making."

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The second program is a 2-year initiative with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services office of minority health to develop leadership training, education, and outreach programs to improve Hispanic health. The initiative's goals include recruiting Hispanics for senior-level positions at HHS and developing a national leadership training program for Hispanic doctors and public health professionals.

"We believe in developing the leadership of [Hispanic] doctors so they understand how to talk to their congressmen and policymakers in their states," Dr. Rios said at a press conference announcing the initiative.

The association currently has two leadership-related fellowship programs, she explained. One, the NHMA leadership fellowship, trains mid-career doctors on how to be better advocates. The other one, the NHMA public health leadership fellowship, involves training Hispanic public health managers to be better leaders for the country.

NHMA board member Dr. Luis Estevez said the association's overall goals go beyond just recruiting Hispanic physicians. "We are [also] forming partnerships to try to build a pipeline to high schools and colleges to not only have more Latinos enter medical school, but also enter health professions in general, be it nursing, technological fields, or medicine," he said.

Another place more Latinos are needed is in the health care system, especially in the top ranks, Dr. Estevez continued.

"One study done at hospital systems in New York found that [in] some of the hospitals that had up to 96 persons [at] the level of vice president and above, including the board of directors, there was not a single Hispanic, despite the fact that these hospitals—which receive federal funds, by the way—are located in Latino communities. You're not going to change the culture of the hospital unless you also affect the governance." ■

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