

AspiringDocs.org—A Campaign Overview

In the fall of 2006, the AAMC launched a new marketing campaign to encourage more minority students to choose medicine as a career. AspiringDocs.org is both a Web site and an outreach effort to provide undergraduate minority students with the support, information, and guidance they need to apply to and enroll in medical school.

The need for a more diverse physician workforce is becoming urgent as the nation's racial and ethnic diversity increases and a nationwide physician shortage looms. While African Americans, Hispanics/Latino, and Native Americans make up 25 percent of the U.S. population, only 12 percent of students who graduate from the nation's medical schools are from these groups. In addition, only 6 percent of all practicing physicians are members of these minority groups. The nation needs the intellectual and research contributions of students from these populations to improve health and discover new ways to curb disease.

U.S. medical schools and teaching hospitals have a decades-long commitment to building diversity in medicine. To complement efforts to increase the pipeline of prospective students, the AspiringDocs.org campaign takes a new approach—career marketing—to reach an untapped segment of potential minority student applicants in America's colleges and universities that was revealed by an innovative AAMC analysis.

This analysis, believed to be the first of its kind, found that while more minority students are graduating with biology degrees (the most common undergraduate major for medical school), the number of these students who applied to medical school has remained flat over the past decade. Between 1993 and 2004, biology majors, on average, represented more than 55 percent of all medical school applicants. While gaps between the number of undergraduate biology majors and medical school applicants exist across all major racial and ethnic groups, they are especially large among African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American undergraduates, the three groups most underrepresented in medicine.

Between 1993 and 2004:

- The proportion of African American biology majors who applied to medical school decreased from 83 percent to 44 percent;
- The proportion of Hispanic/Latino biology majors who applied to medical school dropped from 75 percent to 39 percent; and
- The proportion of Native American biology majors who applied to medical school decreased from 73 percent to 45 percent.

The AspiringDocs.org campaign, which is grounded in extensive opinion research with minority students, seeks to encourage well-prepared African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American college students from all undergraduate majors to pursue medicine as a career. The campaign has three main components:

- a new free Web site, AspiringDocs.org,
- a series of advertisements to promote the Web site and raise awareness of the need to increase diversity in medicine, and
- pilot outreach activities at four undergraduate campuses with large numbers of minority biology majors, but fewer than expected medical school applicants.

The Web site is the campaign's centerpiece. Containing a comprehensive array of information from the AAMC and other resources about key topics that students identified in focus groups, the site also creates a new online community for aspiring doctors where they can ask questions and receive advice from the AAMC as well as other experts in the undergraduate and medical school community such as pre-health advisors, financial aid counselors, medical school students, and practicing physicians. Another feature allows students who register for the site to share their opinions and experiences with other students on a variety of "Hot Topics."

In addition to providing extensive online resources, the Web site is designed to inspire students with real-life stories of practicing minority physicians and medical students who overcame a variety of challenges and barriers on their road to medical school.

A series of advertisements featuring resident physicians, called "Meet the Doctor," has been developed to promote awareness of the Web site and address the more challenging barriers minority students face when pursuing a medical education.

The AAMC is initially introducing the AspiringDocs.org campaign at four college campuses across the country. Pilot programs were launched at the University of Arizona, the University of Pittsburgh and at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey last fall. A final pilot at California State University at Fresno will be launched this spring.

The campaign will continue for the next two years. At the end of that period, the AAMC will use benchmark polls, Web tracking, and applicant data analyses to assess whether the campaign has inspired more students to consider medicine as a career and helped increase the number of minority students who apply to and enroll in medical school.