

Echoes of Crisis: The Student National Medical Association Releases Insights From The Landmark Survey

Dismantling Medical School Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts Threaten to Increase Physician-Patient Gap: Largest Study of U.S. Underrepresented Medical School Students Reveals Urgent Concerns.



Washington, D.C, District of Columbia Apr 30, 2024 (Issuewire.com) - With mounting apprehension over the erosion of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in medical education,

the Student National Medical Association (SNMA) has conducted the largest-ever national survey to date shedding light on critical challenges facing underrepresented medical students across the United States.

Efforts to remove DEI initiatives within academic centers, including the proposed Embracing Anti-Discrimination, Unbiased, Curriculum, and Advancing Truth in Education (EDUCATE) Act introduced by Rep. Greg Murphy, M.D. (RNC), threaten to exacerbate existing disparities in healthcare by prohibiting medical schools from federal funding if they adopt policies and/or requirements concerning diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

Without the efforts of DEI and, similarly, Affirmative Action, the U.S. physician workforce will not reflect the growing needs of a diverse patient population. This undermines progress toward equitable healthcare and jeopardizes the health and well-being of these patients, particularly those who are marginalized and disenfranchised, across the nation. This threatens to undermine the fabric of medical education and exacerbate the physician shortage and ultimately health inequities.

The survey, titled “SNMA AMEC 2024: Attitudes Toward Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Climate,” was conducted during and immediately after the 2024 Annual Medical Education Conference (AMEC), garnering responses from 1,603 medical students and to a lesser degree premedical students and physicians.

The survey revealed alarming trends that underscore the essential role DEI plays in shaping the future of equitable healthcare. The survey demonstrates in real time the devastating impact laws and policies like the EDUCATE ACT are creating on medical school campuses and the nation’s pathways for future physicians.

Results from this landmark survey highlighted several areas of concern, including the following:

- Notable reductions in DEI efforts across medical institutions: 24% of respondents reported the elimination, reduction, or de-emphasis of DEI initiatives at their institutions. Of those affected, 71% noted a reduction or loss of funding and/or the elimination of DEI offices or positions.
- Negative impact on quality of medical education and training: 94% of respondents believe that the lack of, or reduction in, DEI initiatives will negatively impact their education and training. Furthermore, 96% emphasized the essential nature of DEI efforts in shaping their preparation as future physicians.
- Legislative Threat: The introduction of the Embracing Anti-Discrimination, Unbiased, Curriculum, and Advancing Truth in Education (EDUCATE) Act by Rep. Greg Murphy, M.D. (R-NC), poses a significant threat to DEI efforts in medical schools. If passed, the bill would tie federal funding to the prohibition of DEI policies, potentially exacerbating the existing disparities in healthcare.
- Harmful Experiences faced by Minority Medical Students: Hundreds of respondents shared personal experiences, including instances of discrimination and microaggressions, highlighting the urgent need for sustained DEI efforts in medical education. A few specific and startling examples include:
 - “It has been horrible. People are being fired. Our SNMA chapter can no longer use our school logo. We have lost funding. Premed students are less likely to come.”
 - “I was told that it wasn’t worth the admissions committee’s time to reach out to more students of color (i.e. tabling at conferences) because there aren’t enough qualified applicants, and it would be disingenuous to encourage them to apply.”
 - “A school cannot say they do “holistic review processes” without considering

backgrounds, things that make you diverse, and adverse experiences you face.”

In response to these findings, the SNMA underscores the indispensable role of DEI initiatives in fostering a diverse and culturally competent physician workforce addressing the national shortage of physicians.

It is important to note that in March 2024, the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) released projections indicating that the United States will face a physician shortage of up to 86,000 physicians by 2036. These startling findings cannot be overlooked and actually could be worse according to the AAMC.

“Given the new findings, it is clear that both sustained and increased investments in training new physicians are critical to mitigating projected shortfalls of doctors needed to meet the health care needs of our country,” said AAMC President and CEO David J. Skorton, MD. “Most importantly, if additional investments critical to increasing the supply of physicians fail to materialize, projected shortfalls of doctors will be larger than presented in this latest report.”

His opinion is foreshadowed in a 2023 article published in the AMA news where it is asserted that “The physician shortage that we have long feared—and warned was on the horizon—is here. It’s an urgent crisis hitting every corner of this country—urban, rural—with the most direct impact hitting families with high needs and limited means,” said AMA President Jesse M. Ehrenfeld, MD, MPH.

How then can the US not sit up and pay attention to what the pipeline of African American/Black physicians are currently experiencing with the significant cuts in diversity and inclusion practices and support?

While an overall shortage of physicians across all demographics exists, this stark fact shines the brightest:

According to the AAMC-- only about 5.7% of physicians in the United States identify as Black or African American. This statistic does not reflect the communities they serve, as an estimated 12% of the US population is Black or African American.

“As an organization committed to supporting underrepresented minority medical students and addressing the needs of underserved communities, the SNMA reaffirms its dedication to advocating for policies that promote equity and inclusion in medical education,” said *Ja’Nia McPhatter the National President of SNMA and current medical student at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine*. “The SNMA urges policymakers to consider the detrimental impact of dismantling DEI initiatives and emphasizes the imperative of preserving affirmative action policies in healthcare professions. Failure to do so not only undermines progress toward equitable healthcare but also jeopardizes the health and well-being of diverse patient populations across the nation.”

About the Student National Medical Association (SNMA): The SNMA is the oldest and largest student-run organization focused on the needs and concerns of medical students of color. Established in 1964, the SNMA is dedicated to increasing the number of clinically excellent, culturally competent, and socially conscious physicians, with a particular emphasis on addressing health disparities in underserved communities. For more information, please contact the Student National Medical Association (www.snma.org).

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