

Minority Report: Mount Sinai Increases Diversity in Health Care

More than half of New York City's residents are from ethnic groups, according to the latest census data. But you would not know it by looking at the city's medical schools, where minorities are still very much in the minority.

For almost a decade, Mount Sinai's nationally renowned Center for Multicultural and Community Affairs (CMCA) has been working to boost the number of minority physicians and scientists at Mount Sinai, as well as regionally and nationally—and lessen the disproportionate burden of preventable disease, death, and disability found in communities of color.

"Today, more than 20 percent of Mount Sinai's student body comes from groups underrepresented in medicine. That compares to 12 to 13 percent across the nation. And we have increased our black and Latino faculty from four percent to almost eight percent in the last four to five years," says Gary Butts, MD, who directs CMCA and whose title was recently changed to Associate Dean for Diversity Programs, Policy, and Community Affairs (from Associate Dean for Multicultural Affairs) to more precisely reflect his responsibilities within the Medical School. These include facilitating the recruitment of underrepresented groups among students and faculty, accelerating the expansion of research opportunities and funding related to minority health, and enhancing education and training to improve cross-cultural health care for the community.

One reason for CMCA's upward trend is the Center's "grow our own" educational pipeline programs, which have helped some 7,000 local high school and college students from disadvantaged backgrounds prepare for careers in the health professions.

Among these students is Alicia Hurtado, who began working in a microbiology lab at the

Medical Center at the age of 15. "For the first time, I was presented with the idea that if I studied and worked hard, I could one day become a doctor," she remarked last year. Ms. Hurtado is now Dr. Hurtado, a 2005 graduate of the School of Medicine and a resident in the Department of Psychiatry.

CMCA—which in 2002 became a federally funded Health Resources and Services Administration Center of Excellence—also provides mentoring for minority medical students, residents, and faculty; supports the development of cultural competencies in medicine; and promotes research in health disparities.

This past June was particularly eventful for CMCA. The Center hosted the first annual Minority Faculty Development Institute on behalf of the Northeast Consortium for Minority Faculty Development. During the event, experts shared ways to attract and develop minority physicians and scientists for careers in academic medicine.

Also in June, CMCA moved into its new quarters on Annenberg 5. The occasion was celebrated with an open house, featuring a keynote speech by Lt. Gov. David Paterson.

Despite these high notes, CMCA's biggest challenges lie ahead, says Dr. Butts. "First, the pool of potential minority students—particularly minority males—is not as robust as it once was," he explains. "Also, multiculturalism is a continuously moving target. As communities change, our challenge is to be responsive to those changes."

Complicating matters, federal support for programs like CMCA has dropped drastically since 2005. "These programs are not a high priority in Washington," says Dr. Butts. "We're fighting that now and are hopeful that there will be more federal support. Fortunately, we are in a city and a state where there is strong support for programs like ours."



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: At CMCA's Minority Faculty Development Institute, Dennis S. Charney, MD, Dean of the School of Medicine, (left) and Gary Butts, MD (right); John Ruffin, MD, Director of the Center for Minority Health and Health Disparities at the National Institutes of Health; panelists (left to right) Dr. Ruffin, Katrina Armstrong, MD, Associate Professor of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, and Yasmin Hurd, PhD, Professor of Pharmacology and Psychiatry. At CMCA's open house, Lt. Gov. David Paterson.

In the meantime, CMCA is redoubling efforts to recruit more students and faculty, especially in the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, a critical step toward increasing research into health disparities. As Dr. Butts explains, "Who is doing the research has an impact on the questions asked."

Although CMCA's challenges are huge, so are its payoffs. Dr. Butts is reminded of this when he hears from the Center's beneficiaries. Said one, "Yesterday I passed my pediatric boards, and I thought of everyone who made that accomplishment possible. Your name came to mind. You believed in me and guided me. I've come so far."

Hypnosis Reduces Cancer Surgery Pain (continued from page 1)

increase medical costs. Hypnosis is not new to medicine; previous studies have suggested that hypnosis provides benefits.

Dr. Montgomery and his colleagues conducted a randomized clinical trial to examine the effects of hypnosis given prior to breast cancer surgery. Two hundred women were randomly assigned to either 15 minutes of hypnosis provided by a psychologist or an attention control session in which they simply spoke with a psychologist. The researchers then compared the use of pain medications and sedatives during surgery, as well as the levels of pain and other side effects reported afterwards.

The hypnosis session began with ideas for relaxation and pleasant visual imagery. The patients were also given suggestions on how to reduce pain, nausea, and fatigue, as well as instructions on how to use hypnosis on their own.

The study found that patients in the hypnosis group spent less time in surgery (by almost 11 minutes), and their surgical costs were reduced by about \$773 per patient, mainly due to the time savings.

The "combination of potential improvements in symptom burden for... women facing breast cancer surgery and the economic benefit for institutions argues persuasively for the more widespread application of brief presurgical hypnosis," the authors wrote in the paper.