Report Finds Med Schools Must Better Promote Racial Justice

Medical students graded their institutions. Despite improvements, no school earned an A.

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Medical schools must do a better job educating future doctors about racism, promoting diversity and serving patients of color, according to results from a recent survey, reports Reuters.

For the 2019 Racial Justice Report Card (RJRC), medical students at 17 institutions gave their schools an A, B or C grade based on 14 criteria. According to White Coats 4 Black Lives (WC4BL), the national group of medical schools and doctors-in-training who released the report card, metrics evaluated an academic center's curriculum and climate, student and faculty diversity, policing, racial integration of clinical care sites, treatment of workers and research protocols.

Results showed that no school earned an overall A grade. Medical schools earned an overall B-, C+ or C, which meant they didn't meet or only partially met metrics. For example, Harvard Medical School earned an overall C+, the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia earned a C and the University of California, San Francisco received a B-.

A summary noted that none of the schools exhibited medical student and faculty representation proportional to the American population. Fifteen out of 17 schools offered either no public information on racial disparities in medical student evaluation or were reported to have racial disparities in grading and award systems with no plans for mitigation.

In addition, 15 out of 17 schools either gave students greater independence when working with vulnerable patient populations or lacked policies that consistently enforced supervision of students who worked with these individuals; the same number had no public policy governing the payment of a living wage to all employees and did not provide comprehensive health insurance accepted at the academic medical center.

However, 14 out of the 17 schools provided at least a fundamental curriculum about the history of racism in medicine, racial justice strategies and race as a social and political idea, all of which affect health care environments.

According to Mariquit Lu, a cofounding member of WC4BL, students reported that some institutions responded to the report card with genuine interest, while others said they were

targeted, reprimanded, dismissed and even silenced. A few participating med schools acknowledged that changing structural factors will require more work.

“Addressing racial justice through medical schools translates to improved outcomes in very broad arenas, such as a better environment for [people of color] medical students, faculty and staff, health equity among patients, and economic benefit of local communities,” Lu said. “Medical schools and their affiliated academic health institutions are gatekeepers to health and wealth in their communities. They provide health care to a large population, employ large workforces and set the standards and priorities of medical training.”

For similar coverage, read “Minority Medical Residents Are Plagued by Racial Biases.”

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