Impact of Centers of Excellence and Health Career Opportunity Programs on the Number of Underrepresented Minority Physicians

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Abstract

Center of Excellence Programs (COE) and Health Careers Opportunity Programs (HCOP) increase the number of minority physicians available to treat underserved populations by improving student recruitment and performance, improving curricula and cultural competence of graduates, facilitating faculty-student research on minority health issues, and training students to provide health services to minority individuals. The 2003 Health Resources and Services Administration budget plans to cut funds to these programs.

In the 1990’s, underrepresented minorities, (African-Americans, Hispanic, and Native Americans; American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians), comprised approximately 25% of the US population, yet they represented only 4% of all practicing physicians in the US. Minority patients are four times as likely to receive care from minority physicians, and African-Americans and Hispanic medical school graduates are five times more likely to practice in predominately African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods. If the thirty-five support programs are cut, the four black medical schools will not be able to close the gap in training doctors to provide health care to the underserved.

HCOP and COE funding should continue to be made available to all eligible universities in order to continue to train minority physicians to provide health care for the 45 million Americans who currently lack access to health care.