The Efficacy and Impact of Health Career Exploration and Guidance Programs on Diversity and Equity in the Healthcare Workforce

Sanaa Ahmad, Class of 2022 M.D. Candidate
Matthew Hess, Colorado Area Health Education Center

**Background**
- Programs that expose high school students to healthcare careers and medical opportunities are widely implemented, providing guidance for academic courses, standardized test-taking, research opportunities, and career development.
- One study on Colorado health equity showed that racial and ethnic minorities are underrepresented across all the advanced practice health professions that were surveyed in our study.
- The representation of racial and ethnic minorities in Colorado’s healthcare workforce mirrors that of the U.S., suggesting our study results should be generalizable.
- Objective: estimate the proportion of healthcare professionals that benefit from these programs and go on to work in health professions, which we hypothesized was 20% of those surveyed.
- We feel that highly effective health career guidance programs improve health outcomes for disadvantaged and oppressed populations by supporting students from these communities to join the healthcare workforce.

**Methods**
- Surveyed graduate students in healthcare doctoral/advanced practice degree programs about previous participation in career guidance programs during high school.
- We also analyzed survey responses to determine how equitable these career guidance opportunities are.
- We hypothesized that they disproportionately advantaged students based on their:
  - location (urban vs. rural setting)
  - socioeconomic status (household income)
  - Resource availability (medical underserved vs. not)
  - Race (demographics of respondents)

**Degree Programs Surveyed**
- Pharmacy
- Physical Therapy
- Dentistry
- Doctor of Medicine
- Nursing at various degree programs ranging from B.S.N to Advanced Nurse Practice degrees such as D.N.P.
- Physician Assistant
- Master of Science in Anesthesiology
- Master of Public Health

**Results**
- Of the 136 survey responses, 44% stated that they had participated in a health career guidance program during high school, exceeding our hypothesis that at least 20% participated.
- 93% of these participants stated it was influential in their ability to successfully pursue their career.
- When assessing the demographics of our respondents, we found that the majority of the students who benefited from career guidance programs identified as Caucasian at 68%.
- Health career guidance programs accessed by our students were more available in urban settings than rural settings.
- We plan to use these results to advocate for any county or school district to obtain funding to implement and support career exploration programs.

**Most Influential Career Experiences**
- Shadowing a provider
- Volunteering in a hospital/clinic
- Observing procedures/surgeries
- Tour of a medical campus
- Visit to a cadaver lab
- SAT/ACT prep workshops
- Pre-health advising sessions during high school
- Interview skills/resume workshops
- Other
- Personal statement workshops

**Innovation**
- Currently composing a best practices guide to enable any community to implement a healthcare career exploration program.
- Guide includes most influential experiences and funding/budget information sourced from existing sustainable programs.

**References**
- Shimasaki, S. "Health equity and racial and ethnic workforce diversity." *The Colorado Trust, October.*