Program Addresses Shortage Of Minorities In Academic Surgery

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According to a report published in the October issue of the Journal of the American College of Surgeons, a grant-funded program tailored to provide advanced minimally invasive surgery skills to young, underrepresented minority surgeons, is helping address shortages of minority faculty members at U.S. medical institutions.

The report states that the Diverse Surgeons Initiative (DSI) has helped 86 percent of graduates in the program acquire fellowship training. These outcomes surpassed the 2005 national percentage of fifth-year residents in academic postgraduate training who secured fellowship positions by nine percent.

“Our main goal for this program was to provide qualified underrepresented minority residents with the fundamental skills that would enable them to excel in their surgical careers,” stated Paris D. Butler, MD, MPH, the study’s lead author and surgical resident at the University of Virginia Health System in Charlottesville. “There are many potential factors for the shortage of minority faculty in academic medicine, including anything from an insufficient number of minority medical school graduates to a scarcity of role models. We hope that DSI can work to counteract some of those factors.”

Several prominent laparoscopic surgeons created the DSI in 1998 to provide minimally invasive surgery skills to underserved populations of young practicing surgeons. The program focuses on the concepts of preparedness and mentorship in three, two-day sessions over the course of a nine-month period. The sessions include minimally invasive surgery fundamentals, a porcine surgical laboratory for simulating procedures, surgical anatomy reviews, disease pathophysiology lectures and case-based question-and-answer sessions reflecting the American Board of Surgery’s In-Training Service Examination (ABSITE) format.

From 2002 to 2009, the program had 76 graduates, 42 of whom have completed all of their surgical training and are currently in practice. The remaining 34 are still completing some portion of their training. Of the 42 DSI graduates now in practice, 57 percent currently hold assistant, associate, or professorship positions as full-time faculty members in departments of surgery. Minimally invasive surgery was the most frequently chosen fellowship with 21 of the 64 fellowship-eligible DSI graduates.

Medical literature documents that minority physicians have a history of more readily serving underserved communities. In addition, minority patients tend to feel more comfortable receiving care from a minority physician, which suggests that

increasing diversity in the physician workforce is vital in working toward alleviating racial inequities in health care.

“Minority faculty members provide unique perspectives and essential support to minority students through academic and career guidance,” said L.D. Britt, MD, MPH, FACS, chairman of the department of surgery at Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk, VA, and President of the American College of Surgeons. “We hope that DSI continues to grow and becomes a model for other specialties that want to help lower the deficit of minority faculty throughout all of medicine.” For more information, visit www.facs.org [1]

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