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Local Mentoring as a Strategy to Recruit a More Diverse Physician Workforce

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To the Editor: With a lack of diversity in medicine that has remained unchanged over decades, there is an important role for targeted mentorship in underrepresented communities. One proposal has been to start pipeline programs between medical schools and undergraduate institutions with diverse student populations, especially Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Our institution (Vanderbilt University School of Medicine) has implemented such a program; however, we recognize that by design, pipeline programs offer many resources to a small, select group of students. We saw an opportunity to create and share free resources targeted toward students who are underrepresented in medicine to broaden our institution’s scope of mentorship.

A group of students at our university developed a written guide on the premedical process, a template schedule and advice for self-studying for the Medical Colleges Admission Test, and a spreadsheet to track costs associated with applying to medical school. We have reached many students at local universities and the HBCUs in our pipeline program to offer these resources. Furthermore, we have started a virtual webinar series covering important aspects of the premedical process, offering live feedback and advice to prospective medical students.

Future goals include developing a robust collection of shadowing and research opportunities for students within our mentorship system. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it even more challenging for premedical students to access these in-person resources and opportunities without institutional assistance. Ultimately, our hope is to lower the barriers of the medical school application process to increase recruitment of a diverse physician workforce. We encourage groups at other medical schools to employ similar initiatives of local outreach to achieve this goal.
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