Diversifying Physical Therapy: Recruitment and Retention of Under-represented Minorities to Improve Patient Outcomes

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Diversifying Physical Therapy: Recruitment and Retention of Under-represented Minorities to Improve Patient Outcomes

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Introduction

The American Council of Academic Physical Therapy (ACAPT) has determined that physical therapy (PT) education and practice has fallen short of "representation of the general population." Within the profession there is a distinct absence of people who identify as an underrepresented minority (URM), encompassing racial and ethnic groups, low socioeconomic status, geographically underrepresented, and educationally disadvantaged groups. 1

Nationally, more white students and fewer URM were accepted to PT programs compared with applicants in 2016. 2 For Latinos and Blacks, there were fewer applicants compared with the US census. 3 The Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) has diversity-related admissions standards (5A and 5E) for Doctorate of Physical Therapy programs. 4

Importance: Patient Sequelae

Lack of diversity compromises access to PT among URM, thus perpetuating the suffering of disease. Lack of resources lead to decreased levels of physical activity, which compound with a lack of access to care within URM areas and a disproportionate prevalence of disease among URM. URM self-report poorer health than whites, with the largest disparity between white and black people. 5, 6

Factors that act as barriers to URM patients:

- Lack of direct access to facilities and staff members 6
- Disparities appear when patients require extra resources 7
- Providers lack capability of appropriately treating URM patients 7

Benefits from recruitment:

- URM providers are more likely to practice in a high-need areas 9
- Language proficiency and interest in URM support working in high-need areas 9

Theorized Solutions

Current efforts:
- Promote PT as career option - Community service awareness
- Outreach to URM communities - Partner with Tacoma Public Schools Health Careers Curriculum
- Holistic admissions strategies
- Continue Research
  - Presentation at Race and Pedagogy Conference 2018 and at Physical Therapy Association of Washington Conference 2018
- Financial support 10
  - Fellowships for second-year students based on financial need
- Cultural Competency 11
  - Study abroad opportunities for cultural exposure and improved educational environment

For Improvement:
- Promote PT as career option
- Outreach to URM communities - create a national presence
- Standardize prerequisites - work with all PT schools to find common ground
- Mentorship - Provide support structure for mentorship
- Financial support 10
- Distribute first-year fellowships with financial need as a factor
- Administrative support for external scholarship applications
- Academic Support
- Faculty advisor resourced in diversity issues
- Cultural Competency 10, 11, 13
  - Annual cultural competency trainings for faculty and staff
  - Allot increased time to cultural competency for students
- Participate in Sociocultural Awareness Workshop (SAW) One day event hosted by UPS Occupational Therapy program. 10
  - Include guest speakers - PTs who serve in URM areas and URM pts

Applied to University of Puget Sound

References