

Fueling the Pipeline: Dermatology Mentorship for Underrepresented Minority Students

By Dr. Susan Massick



Despite changing racial and ethnic demographics in the U.S. with African Americans composing 12.8% and Hispanics composing 16.3% of the U.S. population, African Americans represent only 3% and Hispanics 4.2% of all dermatologists (Pandya, Alexis, Berger, & Wintroub, 2016). Studies have shown that diversity among health care providers improves patient satisfaction with race-concordant visits showing greater patient satisfaction (Cooper, et al., 2003). Dermatology is the second LEAST diverse specialty in medicine, ranking behind only orthopedics in racial and ethnic diversity (Pandya, Alexis, Berger, & Wintroub, 2016). Moreover, lack of minority representation occurs in all aspects of dermatology, including faculty educators, resident trainees, and skin of color images in textbooks and publications.

Where is the pipeline?

Key action areas for enhancing diversity in dermatology include widening and fueling the pipeline for underrepresented minorities (URM) to pursue dermatology as a career. National organizations, such as the AAD, WDS, and Skin of Color Society, are supporting efforts to increase interest in dermatology for URM students (Pritchett, Pandya, Ferguson, Hu, & Ortega-Loayza, 2018). Residency training programs across the

country are working to eliminate diversity disparities, improve equity, and enhance inclusion by embracing a holistic review during the residency application process to capture a wider applicant pool.

A recent survey of URM medical students cited multiple perceived barriers to applying for dermatology residency, including concern over GPA and USMLE board examination scores, potential risk of not matching, lack of diversity within the specialty, and lack of mentorship (Soliman, et al., 2018). Academic residency training programs are working diligently to normalize a holistic review of applicants and to discourage the notion that rank lists are based solely on USMLE board examination and GPA benchmarks. With the move toward USMLE Step 1 pass/fail grading, this may lessen the emphasis that some programs as well as applicants and their medical school advisors place on board scores. For example, service and community engagement are emerging as important attributes to look for in resident applicants as a measure of commitment to health equity.

What are ways that current dermatologists can help aspiring URM students pursue dermatology as their future career? Mentorship continues to play a critical role for minority students to consider and pursue dermatology as their future career.

Fueling the pipeline

How can you help widen and refuel the pipeline? Mentorship and sponsorship are essential in career development and advancement at every stage of training. Experience and a willingness to share lessons learned are the basis for a successful mentoring relationship. The National Medical Association (NMA) has continued to enhance its mentoring program with specialty specific mentorship committees, headed by NMA Dermatology Chair Dr. Chesahna Kindred, MD, MBA and NMA Dermatology Mentorship Committee Director Dr. DiAnne Davis, MD.

I recently spoke with two aspiring dermatologists and current NMA Dermatology student leaders, Sophia Ederaine, a 4th year medical student at Mayo, and Janet Lubov, a 3rd year medical student at Wright State, about the importance of mentorship.

How did you get involved with NMA Dermatology?

SE: "I wanted to be part of an organization that was created to support us (URM students) and also give us the opportunity to support others."

JL: "I lacked dermatology mentorship at the beginning of my medical school journey. My involvement with NMA Dermatology aligns with my goals of contributing to the bigger mission of connecting URM students with resources to streamline their medical training journey."

What do students or aspiring dermatologists find most helpful when it comes to considering dermatology as a specialty?

SE: "I think the most important thing to encourage more URM students into dermatology is having mentorship. I cannot express how vital it is to have support from dermatologists from any setting to guide and elevate you in medical school and beyond."

JL: “Lowering the barriers to achieving competitive application statuses thematically summarizes the existing gap. While most elements are within control of the students, e.g. test scores, research, mentoring faculty are not equitably available. [Mentors] create a supportive network for students through coaching and introductions to opportunities.”

Tell me about the NMA Dermatology Mentorship Program.

SE: “We created the mentorship program, where URM students can sign up to be matched with a mentor who fits their current needs—whether research, shadowing, the residency application process and more.”

JL: “The NMA Derm mentorship program consists of 1:1 mentorship with students who are passionate about increasing diversity in the field of dermatology. Mentors would have the opportunity to develop impactful relationships with students and to create their mentorship guidelines to fit their relationship. The program exists to help student take the first intentional steps toward a career in dermatology.”

What can WDS members do to help?

SE: “WDS can help amplify our program. Our mentorship program includes hundreds of mentees who need mentors and that has been our limiting factor. Dermatologists can sign up to be a mentor in our program here: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeqF_ZqfzhYOmEbp85wZsuTntNdThQ9RNUUol9eLwLlvCBFOQ/viewform.”

JL: “With cultural competency and diversity at the forefront of medicine, the WDS can bring awareness of our program so that they too can be a part of advancing cultural competency and diversity in dermatology.”

Widening the pipeline

Interested in mentoring an aspiring URM student? Please consider signing up at the link above. NMA Dermatology will match mentors with mentees based on your designated preferences, such as scope of practice, region, and practice interests.

Know of a URM medical student who is an aspiring dermatologist? Encourage them to apply for the [AAD Diversity Mentorship Program Grant](#) with stipend, an intensive one-on-one, four week mentorship elective with the dermatologist of their choice. Applications for the upcoming cycle are due November 1, 2021.

To learn more about improving diversity within residency programs and diversity outreach programming initiatives, WDS will be cohosting the [AAD Virtual Diversity Champion Workshop](#) on October 28, 2021, 10AM-4:30 PM (EST). Co-sponsors include the Association of Professors of Dermatology, Skin of Color Society, and the Society for Investigative Dermatology.

Addressing identifiable and perceived barriers for minority students is critical to improving diversity in dermatology and will require sustained attention to maintaining a supportive and inclusive specialty.

Works Cited

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