Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Human Capital

People are the heart–and the backbone–of our health system. A **capable** and **diverse workforce is critical** to improving the health of all Americans.

Having the right mix of workers and public health services to deliver care is important given the growing diversity of our population and the greater demands that will place on our health system. The Foundation aims to increase the diversity of people working in health and health care, to promote best practices and teamwork across disciplines and job descriptions, and to serve the health needs of a demographically and culturally changing America.

The United States is undergoing a fundamental shift in the age and composition of its population. Changing racial and ethnic makeup of the population will put more pressures on the health care workforce, requiring greater cultural competency and sensitivity. By 2050 racial and ethnic minorities will be half of the U.S. population.[1] Yet minorities are grossly underrepresented in the physician and nurse workforce.

Today African Americans, Latinos and American Indians represent just 9 percent of nurses; 6 percent of physicians and 5 percent of dentists in the United States. Meanwhile, although the diversity of students in the fields of medicine, nursing and dentistry overall has increased slowly for the last three years, there has been a slight decrease in the number of underrepresented minorities in medical school.

We cannot provide quality care for all Americans until we begin to address the racial and ethnic gaps in health care access, the quality of health care received and in health care outcomes. To do that, we need to promote a health care workforce that is more diverse and can better serve minority populations.

[1] *An Older and More Diverse Nation by Midcentury. United States Census Bureau. Washington D.C., 2008. Available at: www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/population/012496.html.*

Through ongoing programs and new initiatives, we are working to change that trend. The *Summer Medical and Dental Education Program* continues to guide underrepresented students to medical and dental careers. And the *Pipeline, Professional Practice: Community-Based Dental Education* program is helping to increase access to dental care for underserved populations. *New Connections: Increasing Diversity of RWJF Programming*, brings new perspectives to RWJF grantmaking by supporting researchers from historically disadvantaged and underrepresented communities. *New Careers in Nursing* is helping alleviate the nursing shortage and increase the diversity of nursing professionals through scholarships to college graduates without nursing degrees who have been admitted into accelerated baccalaureate and master's nursing programs. And the *Harold Amos Medical Faculty Development Program* takes promising minority physicians and mentors them through the difficult transition from residency graduates to successful academic medical faculty.

In addition to recruitment and training, our diversity-building efforts include creating an outreach and recruitment plan for RWJF scholars and fellows programs. We will:

1. Oversee a scan of the health care field and other sectors to identify successful outreach and recruitment strategies.
2. Develop recommendations for successful recruitment of diverse applicants.
3. Attract more diverse applicants across these programs.

We recognize that investing in the health and health care workforce is a long-term proposition that will help change the face of health in America and dramatically improve its quality. Increasing diversity in the health care workforce is an important part of that change, since it will improve health care access and quality for minority patients. Furthermore, underrepresented providers tend to practice in underserved areas which improve access for vulnerable populations.[2]

For additional information about our initiatives and objectives, visit **www.rwjf.org/humancapital**.

[2] *Sullivan Commission on Diversity in the Healthcare Workforce. Missing Persons: Minorities in the Health Professions. The Sullivan Commission, 2004.*

Increase in the Number of Nursing, Medical and Dental Students from Underrepresented Groups, 2003–2007

Source: Dental Data: *American Dental Education Association.* Nursing Data: *American Association of Colleges of Nursing.* Medical Data: *Association of American Medical Colleges.*