COVID-19 Has Galvanized Blacks and Latinos to Become Doctors

People of color applied to medical school at high rates last year.

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As COVID-19 continues to disproportionately affect people of color, new findings reveal that the number of medical school applications rose last year, fueled in part by more African Americans and Latinos applying to study medicine, reports USA Today.

The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), which represents 155 higher education institutions, found that applications for med schools for the 2020 fall school year rose by 18%. In some cases, applications increased by 30%. Some school officials are crediting minorities for the surge.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, people of color in America have contracted and died of the disease at alarmingly high rates. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Blacks, Latinos and Native Americans are almost three times more likely to die of COVID-19 compared with whites.

Minorities also represent a large proportion of health care workers fighting COVID-19 on the front lines. Despite the risks involved, more young people of color have been inspired to take action and help save their communities.

Some med school applicants have lost loved ones to the disease or seen their parents working in health care at a stressful and trying time.

Others hypothesize that applications by Blacks and Latinos have soared for several other reasons. These include individuals not being able to spend a gap year conducting in-person research due to COVID-19 and applicants taking advantage of no-cost, online interviews to apply to more schools than usual. Additionally, some may be pursuing an in-demand profession at a time when jobs are hard to come by.

Although applications are up among minorities, numerous barriers could prevent young people of color from actually attending medical schools or having a good experience, including cost and a lack of role models in medicine.

School officials are working to combat the lack of diversity in the medical field by lowering school costs, offering scholarships and actively courting nonwhite students.

More minority medical students could help fill the need for more doctors. The AAMC estimates that the United States will need 133,000 doctors by 2033.

The increase in the number of applications from people of color also means that medical schools will need to do a better job of ensuring that applicants of color are seen and prioritized.

“Schools have to acknowledge that until as a nation we address access to quality health care, we’ll have a challenge creating a diverse population of medical professionals,” Geoffrey Young, AAMC’s senior director of student affairs and programs, told USA Today.

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