

# 9 Ways to Steer Minorities Toward Dental School

By Michelle Meadows

Closing the Gap, Putting the Right People in the Right Places • May/June 1999

Even though the total number of applicants to the School of Dentistry at the Medical College of Georgia has doubled over the last few years, the number of African American applicants has dropped. There were 21 applicants in 1997, 15 in 1998, and only 9 in 1999, with one acceptance, said Michael Miller, director of student admissions for the school of dentistry.

Miller said the decline in both applications and acceptances results from state legal opinions that discourage the consideration of race in admissions decisions. "The state of Georgia has an African American population of 27 percent and it's disappointing that our dental enrollment doesn't come anywhere near that," Miller said.

Another challenge many dental schools face is competing against medical and other health professions schools for the same pool of applicants. Administrators said the reasons so many students are drawn into medical school over dental school vary. Some hear more about medical school from advisors, and others are reeled in by television portrayals of medical doctors.

Minorities made up 35 percent of first year dental students in 1996-1997, according to the American Dental Association (ADA). The breakdown: 23.4 percent Asian, 5.7 percent Black, 4.9 percent Hispanic, and 0.5 percent American Indian. A key recruiting strategy is to catch students before sophomore year and preferably in high school. The following strategies are designed to help minorities and economically disadvantaged students gain more ground.

- 1. Conduct outreach to area undergraduate schools with the largest number of minorities.** Central to the recruitment efforts at the School of Dentistry at the Medical College of Georgia is an Area Health Education Coordinator. The coordinator will make one visit this Spring to four schools: Georgia State University, Atlanta; University of Georgia at Athens, Augusta State University, and Georgia Southern University. The coordinator also maintains a health professions contact at each school.
- 2. Look for ways to add recruiters.** "We've discovered that to cover more schools and make more visits, we need more recruiters," Miller said. The school, which has received Health Careers Opportunity Program grants in the past, is working on obtaining state funds to hire another recruiter. Other schools find it cost-effective to train current dental students to help with recruitment activities.
- 3. Link up with other schools for dental events.** Miller said his school will continue to stay on top of events at other schools. Past activities include participating in dental week at Morris Brown College and speaking at Morehouse workshops that guide students in applying to health professions schools.

- 4. Contact students who have taken the Dental Admissions Test (DAT).** Sending letters to minorities who have taken the DAT is one of the most effective strategies for the School of Dentistry at Meharry Medical College. The school receives the list from the ADA, said Sandra Harris, chairperson of Meharry's dental admissions committee.
- 5. Administer scholarships that cover the range of dental careers.** To encourage entry of Hispanics into a variety of oral health careers, the Hispanic Dental Association (HDA) administers five scholarship funds. One supported by the HDA Foundation and Procter & Gamble gives scholarships for students in dental, dental hygiene, dental assistant, and dental technician programs. The association, which is led by executive director Raul Garcia, also publishes a newsletter that provides employment opportunities for dentists (1-800-852-7921, <http://www.hdassoc.org>).
- 6. Keep close tabs on the academic success of recruits.** A couple of years ago, the University of Connecticut's School of Dental Medicine entered into a consortium agreement with local public schools and three colleges: The University of Connecticut at Storrs, Central Connecticut State University, and Wesleyan University.
- 7. Hold study-skills programs that include room and board for students.** The University of Connecticut School of Dental Medicine holds a six-week intensive pre-enrollment summer program for prospective dental and medical students from the area colleges. Due to financial reasons, many students need to spend the summer working. To help ease that burden, the School of Dental Medicine works to obtain funding to pay for students' room and board. Funding has come from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the State of Connecticut's Department of Higher Education, Dr. Hurly said. Students can return for subsequent summers for more coursework, rotations, and training in test preparation.
- 8. Educate undergraduate advisors about dental school.** Dr. Hurly said many students haven't considered dentistry because they were never exposed to it. "Many times the health professions advisors in colleges are pre-med advisors," she said. There's a need to bust the myths about dentistry for both students and educators. For example, people don't realize that remuneration for dentists is on par with that of medical doctors. And some students assume dentistry is just about fillings, Dr. Hurly said. "There are so many exciting subspecialties in dentistry that people don't know about."



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9. **Make opportunities easy for students to find.** That's the idea behind *Opportunities for Minority Students in U.S. Dental Schools*, a publication of the American division of equity and diversity at AADS. Association of Dental Schools (AADS). The handbook covers dental school admission requirements, financing a dental education, and school-specific information directed at minority applicants, said Jeanne Sinkford, DDS, associate executive director at AADS. The new edition of the 200-page handbook profiles 14 men and women of various racial and ethnic backgrounds. To order a copy of the handbook, contact: AADS, Publications, 1625 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20036, 202- of the 667-9433, ext. 172. ❖

