

Investigating the Disproportionately Low Number of Minority Physicians Working
in the Healthcare Setting of Robeson County

Honors Project

In fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Esther G. Maynor Honors College

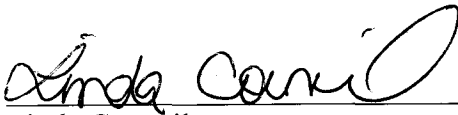
University of North Carolina at Pembroke

By

Linda Christina Council

Biology

May 4, 2016



Linda Council

5/6/2016


Date



Erika Young

5/6/2016

Date



Teagan Decker, Ph.D.

5/6/2016

Date

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Ms. Young in the Biology Department who was my faculty mentor. Your words of encouragement really helped me in completing my senior project. I would also like to thank Dr. Decker for being a great source to turn to for answers to any questions I had along the way. Last but not least I would like to thank UNCP Honors College for providing me with the amazing opportunity to be a part of a group of individuals who are motivated and enthusiastic about learning. Thank you all so much.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Body of Text.....	3
Conclusion.....	9
References.....	10

ABSTRACT

INVESTIGATING THE DISPROPORTIONATELY LOW NUMBER OF MINORITY PHYSICIANS IN THE HEALTHCARE SETTING OF ROBESON COUNTY

Linda Christina Council

Biology with Biomedical Emphasis Degree

The University of North Carolina at Pembroke

May 7, 2016

Robeson County is a very diverse county in North Carolina. With so many different ethnicities, and minorities making up a great proportion of the population, the physician workforce should reflect this diversity, but it does not. Looking into the population of areas such as Pembroke and Lumberton and comparing these numbers to the total amount of minorities who are working in the healthcare setting of Robeson County will show an uneven distribution of minorities who are working as physicians. It is important for the healthcare setting to be a diverse network of individuals who can relate to all patients regardless of race and/or language. Reasons why there are such a low number of minority physicians in healthcare could be from a number of different reasons such as a lack of resources, little to no encouragement, or simply no one there to show them the way to a career in medicine. The number of minority physicians has to increase and programs such as mentoring programs need to be implemented in high schools and middle schools to encourage minority youth to pursue a career in medicine.

Introduction

The physician workforce should represent the population that it serves. The number of African Americans, Latino Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans working in the healthcare field as physicians, are at a staggering low number and this needs to be increased (Bodenheimer & Pham, 2010). According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, demographic census of 2014 the physician workforce comprised of approximately 8.9% of a total of 916,264 physicians who identified as African American, Native American, and/or Hispanic (AAMC, 2014) (Young, Humayun, Chaudhry, Xiaomei, Halbesleben, Polk, & Dugan, 2014). There is a serious need for this number to increase among the number of minority physicians who are working in the medical field. The AAMC not only provides data on the number of minority physicians who are working in the medical field throughout the United States, but this site also provides information on the number of physicians who are working throughout each state and county in the United States. This source also provides information on why it is important for minority doctors to be a part of the healthcare system in order to reach those patients who are living in underserved areas both financially as well as medically underserved.

The information obtained from the AAMC site and scholarly journals will help in understanding why there is such a low number of minority physicians working in the healthcare field of Robeson County. With a total population of 134,760 in a 2014 census, Robeson County has a large number of different ethnicities which include: 32.2% Caucasians, 24.7% African Americans, 39.7% Native Americans, 8.1% Hispanic, and 0.8% Asian, but the number of different ethnicities who live in Robeson County does not match up with the number of different ethnicities seen in the county's healthcare setting (United States Census Bureau, 2015). The research done will focus on the disproportionate number of minority physicians in the healthcare field of Robeson County, with a primary focus on the number of physicians working in the Lumberton and Pembroke area. In this paper the low number of minority physicians in Robeson County will be addressed as well as ways to help improve the number of minority physicians working in the medical field. With the number of different ethnicities living in Robeson County it is imperative that this number be reflected in the physicians who serve these patients. Not only does having a healthcare team which includes nurses, physician assistants, doctors, that resembles the patients that they serve, show diversity, but it is also a source of inspiration for younger generations of different ethnicities to see that they too can become doctors no matter what race they are.

According to the City-Data website the number of individuals who identified as American Indian/Alaska native was approximately 37.9%, those who identified as Black was 24.1%, Caucasian individuals consisted of 27%, and Hispanic individuals comprised about 8.1% of the population of Robeson County (City-Data, 2012). In a calculation done by the AAMC, in 2014, the number of practicing physicians in Robeson County who were Asian, African American, Hispanic, Native American, and Caucasian totaled 14, 18, 3, 25, and 41

respectively(AAMC, 2014). In cities such as Lumberton, which has a total population of around 21,797 in 2013, 39.5% are Caucasian, 12.2% Native Americans, 33.1% African Americans, 10.6% Hispanic and 1.1% Asian. In Pembroke, NC where the total population is 3,015 as of 2013, 56% are Native Americans, 24% African Americans, 12.5% Caucasian, 0.6% Hispanic, and 0.2% Asian, yet there are still low numbers of these minorities in the healthcare setting. (City-data.com, 2013). As the years have gone by it may be safe to say that these numbers may have increased some, but it is still evident that the physician workforce still needs to increase its

Diversity in healthcare is an important attribute of the medical field. The physician number of minorities in the healthcare field within Robeson County. With the wide range of many different ethnicities within Robeson County it is important that hospitals, clinics, and other healthcare facilities mirror, the population that it serves. In a publication from Kara Walker, MD and her colleagues from the University of California, a study was done that determined minority physicians were more likely to serve in rural and underrepresented areas than Caucasian physicians (Walker, Moreno, & Grumbach 2012). This finding was significant in order to reinforce the idea that it is imperative that the physician workforce increase its diversity among physicians. Robeson County is a rural county and has many different illnesses that runs rampant among the residents of this county, especially minority residents. Although there are Caucasian physicians who work in this area, it is important to note that according to (Walker et al., 2012) minority physicians are at a much higher rate to treat patients in underserved areas, such as Robeson County than Caucasian physicians (Walker et.al, 4) (Reed, 2003).

With the population of Robeson County being comprised primarily of minorities, around 70% of the total population, a majority of the health issues are centered among these groups of minorities: African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos (Community

Health Needs Assessment, 2014). Often time's individuals who are minorities feel more at ease with a physician who is of the same race or ethnic background as their own due to segregation and discrimination in the past from the general population as well as health care providers. (United States Department of Human Services, 2006). In a review of racial diversity in the healthcare field the USDHH, stated that increasing the number of minority physicians in the healthcare setting, could lead to an increase in the advocacy and implementation of many different policies that would help benefit minority patients (USDHH, 2006).

Since there are a large number of residents within Robeson County who are of Native American descent who have diabetes, having a doctor who is Native American also who can go in and talk with patients about ways to help treat their diabetes may get more trust from their patients, because the patients believe that since their doctor is of the same ethnicity and possibly the same background as they are, he/she may understand them better than someone who is not of that same ethnicity or way of life. Same thing goes for African Americans who suffer a great deal from heart disease, here in Robeson County. Having an African American doctor come in and talk with a patient who is of the same ethnicity, could in turn make the patient feel more comfortable and trusting of that doctor because he/she can possibly relate to what it is like being African American and that patient can better relate to his/her doctor and may take what that doctor is telling them more seriously than being seen by a doctor who is of another ethnicity than them, and who may not be accustomed to the diet of that particular racial group.

It is also very important to note that not only does racial similarities play a factor in patients feeling more comfortable with their doctors, but patients who speak another language also benefit from having a minority doctors, such as Hispanic Americans. With Hispanic Americans comprising about 8% of the population in Robeson County it is important to know

that not all Hispanics/ Latinos are fluent in English and upon entering a hospital or clinic many need an interpreter or either have their children or spouse translate for them. In a new article by NBC News, Dr. Gloria Sanchez from David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, stated that there is a shortage of physicians who are able to communicate with patients and provide quality care (NBC News, 2015). This is an alarming statement because many patients who cannot speak English may withhold from going to visit a doctor or any healthcare provider due to the fear that they will not be understood because of the language barrier. Increasing the number of Latino American doctors who speak Spanish is a vital necessity as well in Robeson County.

Furthermore, not only does increasing the number of minority physicians in the healthcare setting of Robeson County help improve the relations between patients and their physicians, but having minority physicians is also a source of hope and inspiration for many young people who are of a minority group as well, here in Robeson County. Between the years 2010-2014 only 12% of the population had obtained a degree of bachelors or higher in Robeson County, this is a clear reflection on the low number of physicians that are in Robeson County, which includes both Caucasian and minority doctors (United States Census Bureau, 2014). In an article written by Mitchell and Lassiter (2006) during the year of 2004 only 13.52% of minorities represented the medical portion of doctoral-level graduates in professional school.

It is important that minority students understand that they too can become active leaders in the healthcare field working as physicians. There are practicing physicians in Robeson County who are great examples for other minorities here in Robeson County to prove that being a physician is not about skin color, it is about working hard and remaining determined to succeed. A few physicians who work in the Pembroke area or who are from Pembroke as well as

Lumberton area who are of a minority group here in the United States includes: Dr. Joseph Bell, Dr. Robyn Peace, Dr. Charlene Locklear and Dr. Robin Cummings.

Dr. Joseph Bell is from Pembroke, NC and is an enrolled member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina. Dr. Joseph Bell is a pediatrician and is also a medical director of Pembroke Pediatrics. (North Carolina American Indian Health Board, 2016). Dr. Robyn Peace is an African American doctor who practices in family medicine. Dr. Peace received her medical degree from East Carolina Brody School of medicine (US News and World Report, 2016). Dr. Charlene Locklear is from Lumberton, NC and is a Native American doctor who practices in Family medicine. Dr. Locklear was a graduate of UNC-Pembroke where she completed her pre-med and attended East Carolina Brody School of Medicine for her medical degree (Southeastern Health website, 2012). Dr. Robin Cummings who is a native of Pembroke and a member of the Lumbee Tribe graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill and obtained his medical degree from Duke University and practiced as a cardiothoracic surgeon and became a board and medical director of numerous health care positions (UNCP, 2016). The above mentioned physicians are not only a part of the efforts of the medical society to increase the number of minority physicians in the United States, and especially Robeson County, but they are also role models to future generations of young minority students in order to show them that no matter what their race is, they can become doctors too.

In order to increase the number of minority physicians in Robeson County, there needs to be programs developed to help reach out to minority students and to provide them with the necessary resources that will help equip them with the knowledge of what being a doctor is all about. The American Medical Association (AMA) Minority Affairs Section (MAS) has developed a program called Doctors Back to School. The primary goal of this program is for

minority medical students and doctors to go out to schools in different communities in order to be a role model for minority students. This presence of minority physicians in these schools will help students to see that there are minority students who are physicians and if being a physician is what they want to do, then they can do it too (AMA-ASA, 2016). In the article by Mitchell, the author states that in order to increase the number of minorities in healthcare, there needs to be more exposure of the healthcare professions to minorities (Mitchell & Lassiter, 2005).

Programs that can be initiated here in Robeson County include those in which physicians from Robeson County, come and talk to students primarily in middle school and high school and inform them on the different pathways they can take in order to get to medical and become a doctor. These physicians can also be like mentors to these students, because in many cases minority students who are interested in becoming a doctor, they are the first in their family to be on their way to becoming a medical doctor. Having the support from a practicing physician can not only provide them with encouragement, but these physicians can also be a source of vital information that these students need when preparing for college and medical school.

Another program that can be implemented within high schools is a program similar to Health Occupations Students of America. It could be named Minority Students in Healthcare club (MSH) in which minority students can go on field trips to different medical schools and hospitals and clinics in order to see what it is like to work as a physician in a hospital or clinic setting. Exposing students to health professions is a key step to help increase the number of diverse physicians in healthcare (Mitchell & Lassiter, 2005).

Conclusion

In a county where a vast number of the population is minority, it would seem imperative that the healthcare setting would reflect the population in which it serves. However, after careful observation and research it was concluded that the physician population does not reflect the true diversity of Robeson County. With a push towards developing programs that would help increase the number of minority doctors who work and serve here in Robeson County, it would be predicted that over a course of a number of years, changes will be seen in the number of minority physicians working in the healthcare setting of Robeson County,

It has been determined that many patients who are of a minority often times feel more at ease and better understood when they at least can identify with members of the healthcare team that resemble or at least have some connection to their own culture or ethnicity. Not only is having a diverse physician workforce better for the sake of patients, but having a diverse physician workforce implements the idea that becoming a doctor isn't based off of what race an individual is, it comes from having a sense of determination and a willpower to break through any barriers that come along in order to become a practicing physician. Robeson County is a county that is very unique and fortunate to have a wide variety of different ethnicities and it is no more than right for the healthcare settings that treat these patients, to reflect the population that it serves.

REFERENCES

- American Association of Medical Colleges (2014). Diversity in the physician workforce: Facts and figures 2014. <http://aamcdiversityfactsandfigures.org/>
- American Medical Association. Minority affairs section (MAS). <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/about-ama/our-people/member-groups-sections/minority-affairs-section.page>
- Bodenheimer, T., Hoangmai H. (2010). Primary care: Current problems and proposed solutions. *Health Affairs*. 29(5), 799-805. Doi:10.1377/hlthaff.2010.0026.
- Census Viewer (2011). Population of Robeson County, NC: Census 2010 and 2000 interactive map, demographics, statistics, graphs, quick facts. <http://censusviewer.com/county/NC/Robeson>
- City Data (2012). Robeson County, North Carolina (NC). http://www.city-data.com/county/Robeson_County-NC.html
- Community Health Needs Assessment (2014). <http://publichealth.southernregionalahec.org/robeson/docs/2014%20CHNA%20Document%20Rough%20Draft.pdf>
- Mitchell, D., & Lassiter, S. (2006). Addressing health care disparities and increasing workforce diversity: The next step for the dental, medical, and public health professions. *American Journal of Public Health*. 96(12), 2093-2097
- NBC News (2015). Latino population grows, but rate of Hispanic doctors drops. <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/latino-population-grows-rate-hispanic-doctors-drops-n304446>
- North Carolina American Indian Health Board (2011). Joseph Bell, MD. <http://ncaihb.org/board-joseph-bell.php>
- Southeastern Health (2012). Southeastern medical clinic north Lumberton. <http://www.srmc.org/main/northlumbertonhome.html>
- United States Census Bureau (2015). Quick facts on Robeson County, NC. <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/POP060210/37155>
- U.S. News and World Report. Dr. Robin Peace MD. <http://health.usnews.com/doctors/robin-peace-149344>
- University of North Carolina at Pembroke (2016). Meet the chancellor. <http://www.uncp.edu/about-uncp/administration/departments/chancellor/meet-chancellor>

United States Department of Health and Human Services (2006). The rationale for diversity in the health professions: A review of the evidence.

<http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/healthworkforce/reports/diversityreviewevidence.pdf>

Walker, K., Moreno, G., Grumbach, K. (2012). The association among specialty, race, ethnicity, and practice location among California physicians in diverse specialties. *Journal of National Medicine Association*. 104(0), 46-52.

Young, A., Humayun, C., Xiaomei P., Halbesleben, K., Polk, D., Dugan, M. (2014). A census of actively licensed physicians in the United States, 2014. *Journal of Medical Regulation*. 101 (2), 8-23.

