

The lack of black men in medicine

June 6 2017, by Kristen Cole

In the dozen years it has been on television, the fictional medical drama "Grey's Anatomy" has garnered numerous awards. But the show's biggest accomplishment may be the diversity of the actors, cast as doctors using a color-blind technique.

Unfortunately, racial diversity in the field is not reality.

In fact, [medical school](#) matriculation rates for black males have failed to surpass those from 35 years ago, according to a recent analysis of data from the Association of American Medical Colleges and information from a paper by Marc Nivet, presented by two UConn Health researchers.

African-American men make up just 2.8 percent of the applicants to medical school. Out of all African-American applicants, only 38 percent are men, and black males who are unsuccessful in their first application are less likely to reapply than their white counterparts, they write.

Their findings are set against a backdrop in which there have been overall increases in the rate of black male college graduates and a prodigious expansion of medical schools in the U.S.

"The absence of Black males in medical school represents an American crisis that threatens efforts to effectively address health disparities and excellence in clinical care," according to their paper in the *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*.

The article was authored by Cato T. Laurencin, the Albert and Wilda Van Dusen Distinguished Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery and chief executive officer of the Connecticut Institute for Clinical and Translational Science (CICATS); and Marsha Murray, research assistant in community medicine and healthcare. It was funded by CICATS and the National Institutes for Health.

To reverse the trend, they say, it is necessary to ascertain the societal factors that support growth and success of black males in medicine.

Laurencin and Murray outline challenges influencing black [males](#), including financial cost, bias and stereotypes, career attractiveness, and underperforming schools. The high probability of [black males](#) attending underperforming schools that lack pre-medical resources influences the number of students in the "pipeline."

"The trends demonstrate our inability to attract and sustain a diverse physician workforce," they write, adding, "The creation of a diverse medical workforce is crucial to quality healthcare."

Research has shown that racial and ethnic diversity in medical education improves the learning and cross-cultural competencies of all doctors. And minority medical students are more likely to work in underserved communities and, therefore, positively influence access to care.

"You cannot have a great medical center without the presence of black and other diverse doctors," says Laurencin. "That's what the great places recognize."

It doesn't just make for great television.

More information: Cato T. Laurencin et al. An American Crisis: the Lack of Black Men in Medicine, *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health*

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