Medical Xpress

Addressing the challenges faced by physicians underrepresented in medicine

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In a noteworthy report addressing the challenges faced nationwide by current and future physicians who are underrepresented in medicine, clinician-scientists from Regenstrief Institute, Indiana University School

of Medicine and University of Washington School of Medicine discuss a leaky career pipeline and highlight enhancing mentorship and sponsorship relationships as critical to improving diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and professional success.

The authors identify women of any race or ethnicity, individuals identifying as Black, indigenous, or people of color, those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, plus (LGBTQ+), and those with disabilities as individuals underrepresented in medicine, especially surgery.

The report calls for conscious action to address and confront bias in mentorship and sponsorship experiences of those underrepresented in medicine. The authors provide a practical framework to foster mentor and sponsor relationships aimed at building leaders among those who are underrepresented in medicine. This should begin with an understanding by non-minority leaders of the inequities and discrimination challenges faced by physicians underrepresented in medicine.

A mentor guides a mentee on skill and career development and offers advice. A sponsor uses personal influence to advocate for the protégé's career advancement. Mentorship and sponsorship may overlap, and mentors can become sponsors. The report said both relationships should be based on trust, respect, open communication and commitment to advancing the junior person's career.

"All physicians are busier than ever with COVID but we cannot be unaware of nor ignore the challenges faced by physicians historically unrepresented in medicine. Apathy has severe consequences which we cannot afford," said report author Regenstrief Institute Research Scientist Andrew Gonzalez, M.D., J.D., MPH, an IU School of Medicine assistant professor of surgery. "Non-minority in medicine leaders need greater awareness and understanding of the inequities and

discrimination challenges faced by those who are underrepresented in medicine." Dr. Gonzalez is the associate director for data science of Regenstrief Institute's Center for Health Services Research.

"Most minorities in medicine are well versed in understanding the hardships of majority physicians because it is the prevailing narrative of medicine," he added. "The reverse is not true. We all need to work on that knowledge gap."

"Understanding and finding opportunities for inclusive mentorship and sponsorships in vascular surgery" is published in the *Journal of Vascular Surgery*.

More information: Elina Quiroga et al, Understanding and finding opportunities for inclusive mentorship and sponsorships in vascular surgery, *Journal of Vascular Surgery* (2021). DOI: 10.1016/j.jvs.2021.03.048

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