

HEALTH

Percentage of minorities entering medical school drops

LITTLE ROCK (AP) — The University of Arkansas for Medical Science has experienced a decline in minority enrollment but says it wants to expand its minority recruiting.

Black students make up fewer than 5 percent of the first-year class at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences College of Medicine. That's down from more than 9 percent in 1996.

Nationally, blacks have held steady at 7 percent of medical school admissions.

"We feel like we've done a good job (recruiting)," says Tom South, admissions director for the UAMS College of Medicine. "But obviously, there's a lot of room for improvement."

Medical schools looking to increase minority enrollment face low enrollment in undergraduate programs, intense competition for talented students and legal challenges to race-based affirmative-action programs.

"It's a real problem now," South said. "Every medical school is trying to recruit many of the same students."

Last year, four applicants from minority

groups turned down full-tuition scholarships to UAMS for out-of-state schools that offered better financial packages.

In addition, the overall minority population is increasing, while the number of medical school applicants overall, including minority applicants, is decreasing.

About 12 percent of the country's population is black, but blacks make up only 3 percent of the country's doctors. Hispanics make up about 10 percent of the population, but fewer than 5 percent of doctors.

In Arkansas the number and percentage of applicants from minority groups have fallen. In 1996, the 98 black applicants to the College of Medicine represented 11 percent of the 890 applicants. Two years later, the 63 black UAMS applicants accounted for 8.3 percent of applicants.

The number of black students who enroll at UAMS has dropped more steeply. In 1996, 13 black first-year medical students made up 9.3 percent of their class. This year, the seven entering black students made up 4.8 percent of the class. Hispanic students accounted for 1.4 percent of the entering medical-school

class.

According to 1997 census estimates, slightly more than 16 percent of the state's population is black. A little less than 1 percent of the population was Hispanic when the 1990 census was taken.

To remedy that, medical schools should consider not only grade-point averages and test scores in admitting applicants but also cultural and economic background, commitment to community service and ethnicity, the Pew Health Professions Commission says.

The commission also recommends that universities and medical schools expose elementary and secondary students to career opportunities in science and health professions.

South says UAMS does both.

Because of court decisions that have ended affirmative-action programs in several states, UAMS does not consider race when evaluating applicants, South says. But the admissions committee considers other nonacademic factors, such as social and cultural experiences and economic situation.

"We're simply telling the admissions committee that there are no quotas and there never have been, never will be," he said. "But look at their background, what barriers maybe they had to overcome to get to where they are now."

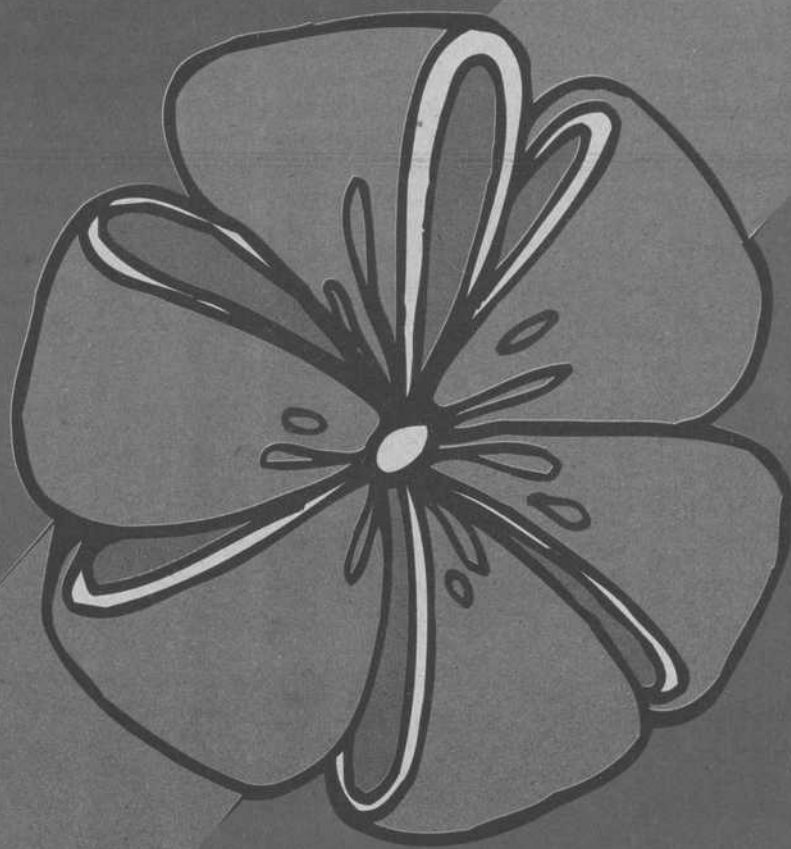
UAMS also tries to sell students on science, medicine and health-related professions long before they reach college.

For the last five years, UAMS recruiters have visited junior high schools throughout central Arkansas and the Delta, says Bill Bauknight, director of the office of minority affairs at UAMS. The students hear about opportunities in health professions. The presentations stress optimism, hard work and commitment to academics, Bauknight says.

UAMS also holds one career conference each semester for high-school and junior-high students and plays host to summer programs to help students with English, chemistry and biology.

"Basically what we attempt to do — and I think we do a pretty good job of it — we acknowledge to these individuals that there are opportunities," says Bauknight.

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