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UCLA Center Director Works With Community Colleges to Help Increase the Number of Latino and Black Students Pursuing Medical Careers

Hoping to boost the number of Latino and black students who pursue careers in medicine, the director of a UCLA center has created a community college course to help students develop their interests in the medical profession.

“We want to create a bridge,” said David E. Hayes-Bautista, director of the UCLA Center for the Study of Latino Health and Culture. “Our goal is to build a pipeline from community colleges to four-year colleges to professional schools for students interested in pursuing careers in medicine.”

The first class is being taught this fall semester at Cerritos College. By fall 2003, five more community colleges are scheduled to add the course to their curriculum. They are East Los Angeles, Allan Hancock, Whittier, El Camino and Rio Hondo colleges.

Hayes-Bautista said statistics gathered by a University of California committee show that 3,000 to 4,000 Latino and black first-year students expressed an interest in going to medical school, but four years later, only 150 will be accepted to medical school. The professor said he hopes to at least double that number.

“Our goal to double the number of Latino and African-American medical students seems audacious, but it really is modest,” Hayes-Bautista said. “Doubling the number gives us the same number of students that we had in 1992.”

Students will pursue careers in medicine, dentistry, nursing, pharmacy, health care administration and health policy through the class, called Inter Campus Health Professional Development Program. It is referred to as MedPEP, which in Spanish stands for “Medicos Para el Pueblo” and in English stands for “Medical Professional Education Preparations.”

Hayes-Bautista said he wanted the course taught in community colleges because of the high number of minority students enrolled, many of whom go on to four-year colleges and universities.

2-2-2 Future Doctors

“As most Latino and African-American pre-meds start in the community colleges, we felt we needed to be in the community colleges with them,” Hayes-Bautista said.

The MedPEP curriculum includes teaching students about health issues that affect the Latino and black communities; among them is the study of the “Latino epidemiological paradox,” a phenomenon in which Latinos are in better health than non-Hispanic whites, despite the fact that their access to and use of health-care systems, socioeconomic status and education levels are lower.

The course also looks at diseases such as diabetes, cancer and HIV, and the history of medicine from Aztec medicine to the present day. In addition, the class explores the issues of lack of health insurance and insurance provider shortages.

Hayes-Bautista developed the curriculum after a report issued by his center in 1999 found a shortage of Latino doctors in California. That study found 30 percent of the state’s population was Latino, but Latino physicians accounted for 4.8 percent of all doctors licensed in the state. A recommendation in the report was to provide training for Latinos interested in pursuing medical careers.

Exacerbating the problem is the declining number of Latino and black students enrolling in medical schools in recent years, Hayes-Bautista said.

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