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Title of Proposal: A Preliminary Look at the First-Generation Medical Student Experience

BCM Mission Area: Research

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Abstract:

Background: Broader admission of underrepresented minority applicants through holistic reviews has helped create a physician workforce more representative of the U.S. population. Historically, a significant portion of URM students are first-generation (FG) students. FG medical students are medical school applicants “whose parents have not earned an associate’s degree or higher”. First Gen, MD is a student organization at BCM that supports first-generation medical students with mentorship and involvement. Objectives: This literary review and preliminary survey seek to illuminate how FG students experience medical school in hopes of increasing support at an administrative level. Methods: The literary search used PubMed as the primary database and included a set of keywords relevant to the FG medical student experience using inclusion and exclusion criteria. An electronic survey administered to all MS1s at BCM in August 2021 through Qualtrics asked them to rate seven barriers on a four point scale (1=not a barrier, 4=extreme barrier). Students completed an open-ended response question indicating the largest perceived obstacle during the application process. Responses to rated barriers and the open-ended response were compared between first-generation and non first-generation students using samples t-tests and text analysis through themes. Results: Preliminary survey results indicated, respondents who were first in their immediate family to go to a four-year college (first-gen) rated "paying application fees" (M=2.14, SD=.95; t(144)=3.32, p=.001, Cohen's d=.75) and "other financial hardships" (M=2.14, SD=1.03; t(114)=2.73, p=.016, Cohen's d=.78) as stronger barriers to applying to medical school compared to those who were

not first-gen (M=1.45, SD=.72 and M=1.37, SD=.76, respectively). Respondents who were the first to go to med school (first med) also experienced "paying application fees" (M=1.65, SD=.82; $t(144)=3.70$, $p<.001$, Cohen's $D=.74$) and "other financial hardships" (M=1.54, SD=.89; $t(144)=3.12$, $p=.002$, Cohen's $D=.80$) as a greater barrier than those who were non-first med (M=1.13, SD=.41 and M=1.18, SD=.46, respectively). In addition, first med respondents also rated "lack of mentorship" (M=1.71, SD=.90; $t(144)=3.99$, $p<.001$, Cohen's $D=.81$) as a greater barrier than non-first med respondents (M=1.26, SD=.45). Conclusions: Policies to support these students beyond matriculation must be a priority to ensure their success. 'Paying application fees' and 'other financial hardships' are stronger barriers to applying to medical school for first-generation and first-med students compared to non-first-generation or non-first-med peers respectively. 'Lack of mentorship' was also greater for first-med vs. non-first med students. Future Directions: Our second electronic survey will launch in December of 2021 via Qualtrics to all first-year medical students at BCM after completion of the Foundations Basic to the Science of Medicine Course. We will assess how pre-medical experiences and barriers can shape the perceptions of medical school and analyze differences in experiences of FG and non-FG medical students.