

Enhancing Health Equity within the Georgia CTSA: Identifying Programmatic Opportunities for Increasing URM Faculty Support

Addressing health equity issues and improving diversity, equity, and inclusion are central goals for the Georgia Clinical and Translational Science Alliance (Georgia CTSA). Faculty in Clinical and translational science (CTS) play critical roles in education, research, and community engagement.

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Introduction

Lack of underrepresented minority faculty (URMF) pose significant barriers to health equity through deficiencies in cultural competence, diversity, and systemic bias. URMF also provide experiential support and guidance to URM students, trainees, and junior faculty. Supporting the URM workforce is a key goal of the NCATS CTSA program.

Objective

Addressing this gap in URMF representation is critical to the development and advancement of equitable health care systems. This project will evaluate the thoughts and experiences of URM CTS faculty and identify factors that contribute to their successful recruitment, retention, and promotion at four Georgia CTSA partner institutions.

Methodology

This project is aligned with the tenets from the Georgia CTSA Health Equity logic model which depicts the relationships among alliance-wide resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact, emphasizing the importance of health equity as a guiding principle, the fundamental importance of education, inclusive excellence, and the need for integration and collaboration.



- Mixed methods research design through use of qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey
- Established a cross-institutional working group of high-level Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) institutional leaders to build rapport and promote the exchange of DEI initiatives and best practices
- Faculty inclusion criteria:
 - NIH definition of URM racial and ethnic groups in health-related sciences, defined as, "Individuals from racial and ethnic groups such as Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and other Pacific Islanders"
 - Active faculty position at one of the four partner institutions
 - Clinical and translational science disciplines
 - Perform or participate in research
- Identified investigator data from internal Georgia CTSA Request and Progress Information Database (RAPID), relevant health sciences institutional leadership, Google searches utilizing public institutional websites and databases containing current faculty information
 - Self-identified race/ethnicity data was carefully verified by each participant prior to data collection

Analysis



Focus Groups

Data collection began with conducting focus groups with URM faculty at Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM).

- Focus groups of URM faculty, split between junior and senior faculty academic ranking
- 60-minute duration via Zoom virtual video conferencing

Research Domains

Participants were asked to share their experiences related to the following identified research domains, and initial interviews resulted in the following key findings:

DIVERSITY AND RECRUITMENT

- Effective methods of URMF recruitment include targeted professional organization connections and current faculty identifying people that best align with the institutional mission
- The limited URM CTS faculty pool makes recruitment very competitive across institutions

PROMOTION, RETENTION, AND TENURE

- Though promotional opportunities exist for junior and senior faculty, participants were not aware of any structured policies directed specifically toward retention
- In the absence of a tenure process, faculty's ability to produce subsequent grant funding is a significant marker of productivity and opportunity for promotion

SUPPORT AND MENTORSHIP

- Junior URMF highlighted the importance and difficulty in finding compatible, sustainable mentorship, which provides greater success with career development and professional opportunities
- Senior URM faculty noted the lack of designated, built-in time for mentoring outside of traditional training activities

TEAM SCIENCE AND PROMOTION OF COLLABORATION

- All faculty emphasized the benefits experienced by team science and cross-collaborative research participation and acknowledged their institution's active efforts toward increasing interprofessional education and transdisciplinary work
- Many collaborative opportunities are identified in informal settings, such as faculty or departmental meetings, but increasing communication of ongoing research opportunities through central, accessible outlets would increase awareness

Future Directions

Overall, junior and senior faculty were positive about the URMF support received at MSM but identified key areas for further improvement in the current efforts in place.

- Complete key informant interview process at remaining partner institutions and analyze findings and identify key themes across all four institutions
- Launch a quantitative survey to assess a larger sample of URM and non-URM faculty groups to further tease apart experiences unique to URM faculty
- Use evaluation findings toward the development of recommendations on the employment of existing resources, or the creation of a new program, to support and implement promising practices to improve URM faculty experiences
- Future efforts to center and promote experiences of URMF are important to enhance diversity and develop implementable, scalable, and effective efforts to increase the number of URMF within the Georgia CTSA