Underrepresented Students and Health Care Professions

All health care fields are working to improve the diversity in their professions. The goal is to have a health care workforce that is representative of our population. Efforts to improve diversity range from providing school children with special lessons to summer enrichment and research opportunities for underrepresented students. This work is often referred to as improving the medical pipeline because it helps channel more students into healthcare fields. A diverse workforce is more responsive to cultural differences among patients and other practitioners. Many patients also prefer seeing providers who come from similar backgrounds so this helps improve the problems of health care disparities that we see in this country. African Americans, Latino/a, and Native Americans are especially needed in medicine where they make up only 12% of the workforce while being a much larger percent of the overall population.

How is underrepresented defined?
Programs define this differently, but they often base it on the student coming from a medically underserved community. Being medically underserved is often based on socioeconomic level and/or ethnicity. Medical schools also use the concept of a disadvantaged status which they define as being from a medically underserved population and/or being on state and/or federal assistance.

What programs are available?
Many health care training programs and their national organizations have plans to improve the medical pipeline. One effort is to provide summer enrichment programs. Although these are often open to all students, the original intent of the programs was to provide underrepresented students an opportunity to learn about and explore these careers.

Summer Medical and Dental Education Program (SMDEP): is a free 6 week summer enrichment program for first and second year pre-medical and pre-dental students. Highly recommended programs!
http://www.smdep.org

Other summer programs can be found at:  http://services.aamc.org/summerprograms/

Database of summer programs:  http://explorehealthcareers.org/en/careers/programs

Student National Medical Association (SNMA) is involved with supporting the interests of underrepresented medical students and those interested in health disparity issues.  http://www.snma.org

Student National Dental Association (SNDA) supports the interests of underrepresented dental students.
http://sndanet.org

Further information: You can begin your search for more career information at: Aspiring Doctors
http://www.aspiringdocs.org