

# Diversity as a Vehicle for Excellence: Perspectives on a More Inclusive Recruitment Process in Emergency Medicine

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The benefits for advancing diversity in medicine are clear,<sup>1</sup> yet according to recent data,<sup>2</sup> no specialty represented either the Black or LatinX populations in proportion to the overall U.S. population. According to projections,<sup>2</sup> it will take emergency medicine (EM) as a specialty 54 years to achieve LatinX representation comparable to that of the U.S. population. For reference, OB/GYN is projected to take 35 years, Internal Medicine and Pediatrics, 61 years, and Orthopedic Surgery, 93 years.<sup>2</sup> The time is past due for the conversation to move from celebrating why diversity is vital to designing antiracist systems that focus on a more inclusive recruitment process.

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Underrepresented in medicine (UiM) refers to groups who are underrepresented in the medical profession relative to their numbers in the medical profession. While this gap is more than just a pipeline issue,<sup>3</sup> we must also address pathways to increase representation at every level of training and leadership positions. This effort requires deliberate work on recruitment.

Implicit bias is a significant barrier in recruitment. We all have our own biases.<sup>4</sup> Having these biases do not immediately make us racist, either. How we manage these biases and prevent them from affecting efforts on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is essential. In undergraduate medical education, bias exists in trainee evaluations and arbitrary metrics such as the USMLE tests.<sup>5</sup> These have enormous implications for membership to the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Society or getting highly competitive residency training and leadership opportunities.<sup>6</sup> This leads to a strong

argument for developing a formal holistic review process that moves away from using bottleneck metrics and instead takes careful consideration on one's distance travel to medicine, grit, and perseverance to life's challenges, and allyship and service to our community.

Developing holistic review requires having the needed challenging conversations with your team.<sup>7</sup> This includes acknowledging everyone's biases and focusing on the alignment of your recruitment process to your department's mission, vision, and values. Having a shared understanding of your department's priorities will make it easier to make the necessary changes, such as eliminating or lessening the weight on bottleneck metrics in your recruitment. This also allows you to creatively design screening rubrics and standardized interview questions that value allyship, service to the community, compassion, and all the other characteristics your organization hold in high regard.

For this to be successful, it is important to hear as many dissenting voices in your group so everyone feels heard and the screening process becomes authentic to your own organization. Once everyone has shared their perspectives, the leadership needs to develop a unified goal and be transparent about the process.

Who comprises the recruitment team is also important. Representation is key. Evidence is clear the UiM representation in the leadership role affects perceptions of candidates to rank programs higher. If your group is starting with no representation, be clear about your goals, and share evidence of your group's work to change this. On the other hand, tokenism,<sup>8</sup> or using symbolic efforts to highlight diversity, is also detrimental to the process and is inauthentic. Moreover, it is also important to appropriately recognize efforts on recruitment. Minority tax refers to the expectation added to

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UIM colleagues to do efforts to help advance diversity, often without added remunerations.<sup>9</sup> These roles take the focus away from efforts to advance one's career focusing on their academic interests, research, or expertise.

The interview in itself is vulnerable to harmful practices that interfere with an inclusive recruitment process. Common pitfalls include microaggressions or the subtle, indirect expressions of prejudice,<sup>10</sup> often while not intended to be harmful, that negatively impact the receiver. Microaggressions undervalue the receiver. An example is asking, "do you play sports?" to a Black student attending an Ivy League school, which implies the student does not deserve to be there other than for sports. Stereotype threat assumes that affirmative action facilitates recruitment of UIM faculty to simply check off a box.<sup>11</sup> From the recruitment side, tokenism refers to hiring practices just to meet metrics. Homophily is the tendency to share similarities,<sup>12</sup> such as talking about hobbies and activities, which may be isolating for those

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UIM candidates. This is why “fit” is prone to bias.<sup>13</sup> Let us move away from focusing on fit and instead focus on systematic, measurable, and meaningful qualifications. This holistic review humanizes the candidate. Along this line, create space to encourage belongingness through virtual hangouts that allow candidates to remotely experience your culture--didactics, work environment, meetings.

Each of us can play our part to recognize the inequity against UIM candidates and use our role as allies to develop a system that corrects these injustices. We can start by educating

ourselves about these critical concepts. We can create space to discuss how we can then address this to create an inclusive recruitment process. Through careful and intentional efforts, we can design a fair recruitment environment that fosters equity and inclusivity. Celebrate the success of these efforts within your team. Advancing diversity is the vehicle to excellence, and you can play your part. We don't have to wait the projected half a century to achieve this. We can start now. ●

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