

Diversity in medicine



PHOTOS BY MOLLY URBINA/THE DAILY REFLECTOR

Brayden Hargrove, left, and Eyad Thaher, right, students at J.H. Rose High School, learn intubation at the pre-medical conference at East Carolina University's Brody School of Medicine on Saturday.

Brody students help minorities visualize future

BY KAREN ECKERT
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A popular motivational expression goes like this: "If you can see it, you can believe it and you can achieve it."

The 10th Annual Pre-Medical Conference held on Saturday at East Carolina University's Brody School of Medicine gave under-represented minorities an opportunity to relate that idea to the field of medicine.

The conference, sponsored by the BSOM Student National Medical Association, was designed to let students who are African American, Latinx and Native American, interact with people who look like them that are already in medical school or who already are medical professionals.

The group says it is the oldest and largest student-run organization focused on the needs and concerns of medical students of color.



Students learn intubation among many other skills at the conference.

you cannot be what you cannot see," said Simone Boney, a second-year medical student and the conference chairwoman. "If it never occurred to you that you could become a doctor, and you've never seen anyone who looks like you doing that, you would never dream to become that."

There were two factors in Boney's life that influenced her desire to attend medical school, she said.

One, she became aware of the medical needs of people in her hometown of Fuquay-Varina through some volunteer work that she did, and, two, she attended an event similar to the one she helped organize for Saturday when she was in high school.

"I think what really helped me was seeing people that looked like me and seeing the need in my community," said Boney, who is African American.

The conference offered activities and demonstrations for students in middle school, high school and college, as well as for students who have already graduated from college and are now considering medical school. Sessions were also available for parents, according to organizers.

"We want to make sure that every group gets specific encouragement and exposure," said Dr. Cedric M. Bright, associate dean for admissions at the Brody School of Medicine, and a faculty adviser for SNMA.

The middle and high school students who attended were from schools in eastern North Carolina, while the college students were from throughout the state, organizers said.

Several students from N.C. Central University in Durham attended.

George Manning, who is from Long Island, N.Y., attends NCCU and

is a chemistry major with a concentration in pre-medical courses. He is scheduled to graduate in December.

Manning talked about some of the things he had learned at the conference.

"It's not a race. You don't have to pressure yourself so much, like to try to (get a degree) in four years," he said.

Manning said he was interested in taking a gap year between college and medical school. At the conference he heard from a lot of people who had done that, he said.

A representative with an organization called MedServe was at the conference, manning a table where students could pick up information about spending a gap year as a fellow with that program.

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MedServe fellows are recent college graduates who have completed a pre-medical curriculum and are taking time off before medical school, according to the organization. They spend two years as full-time, active helpers in medically underserved communities.

Manning said he was looking into the MedServe program.

The level of studying needed in medical school was another topic that Manning said he found interesting.

At lunchtime, conference participants heard from keynote speaker Dr. Kendall Campbell, dean of Diversity Affairs and chief inclusion officer at Brody, about the difference between studying in college and medical school.

Campbell illustrated the volume of responsibilities that come a student's way in medical school by tossing tennis balls at some volunteer participants, first one at a time, then two at a time and then three at a time. The volunteer was able to catch two balls at a time, one in



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Annaka Evans, a South Central High School student, gets a cast applied to her wrist at a station at the pre-medical conference at East Carolina University's Brody School of Medicine on Saturday.

each hand, but the third ball got dropped. He demonstrated pace by tossing tennis balls slowly at first and then with increasing speed.

Campbell also talked about the types of learning that occur in medical school. There may be some lectures, but much of the

learning in medical school is more active, for example, problem-based or team-based.

Manning said that another feature of the conference that he liked was the panel discussion where students currently enrolled at Brody talked about their own

journeys toward medical school.

The conference offers

some reality-based scenarios, also, that Manning found interesting, such as a session where participants got to hold in their own hands, while wearing gloves, actual body parts such as a human brain, heart and foot, he said.

Saturday's conference helped to fulfill one of Brody's key missions, which is to increase the access to medical education for racial and ethnic minorities in the state, Bright said.

In fact, increasing that access was a mandate by the state Legislature to the school when it was established in 1974, Bright said.

There are no quotas for minority admissions, Bright said, but there are guidelines that are based on the demography or population of the state.

Currently the percentages of minority groups enrolled in Brody reflect the percentages of minority groups within the state, Bright said.

In 2018, 29 percent of students enrolled at Brody rep-

resented minority groups and in 2019, 30 percent, he said.

"We still have a long way to go, though, in terms of having the population of physicians in North Carolina reflect the (general) population," said Dr. Cassandra Bradby, another faculty adviser to SNMA.

"While we have increased the number of people enrolled in our medical school to reflect the population of North Carolina, in terms of doctors overall for the state we still have a long way to go," she said.

According to Bright, Saturday's event is important as it serves as a pipeline for minority students to the medical school.

"Diversity in our medical school is so important," Bright said. "We have to address health disparities to decrease the economic burden on our nation."

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