

continues well beyond graduation.

A final test of our medical graduates is their capacity to live a balanced life that blends an expected dedication to the individuals and communities they care for with personal health and well-being. Demands on each end of this spectrum are ever-changing but our goal remains to foster a capacity to embrace an exciting and challenging future with a truly caring and ever-

learning attitude. My crystal ball does not reveal indisputable answers to the opening questions; however, by encouraging the best, our students will continue to exceed the standards in this highly privileged and exciting profession.

Harold Cook
*Dean, Faculty of Medicine,
 Dalhousie Medical School*

Checking the box – Minorities and medical school

From the 2005-2006 Dalhousie Faculty of Medicine application form:

Applicants who wish to be considered in one of the following categories should indicate this here:

- Indigenous Black
 Aboriginal

What does “checking the box” mean for a prospective medical student? At Dalhousie this information is collected solely for the purpose of awarding funding (e.g., the Elizabeth C. Weld Award) and not as criteria for admission. However the idea of “checking the box” remains a powerful symbol of the importance of diversity in medicine. As discussed in the “Diversity and Medicine in Canada” position paper of the Canadian Federation of Medical Students,¹ a diverse medical community is important from a physician, patient and student perspective. One of the greatest challenges identified in the report is with respect to recruitment of students from black and aboriginal communities. The potential for (and often reality of) underrepresentation of minority groups in medical education risks perpetuating underservice to vulnerable populations, creating barriers to appropriate and timely care and limiting opportunities for learning.

If we as future physicians are to be representative of the Maritime population we must include

among our ranks members of Aboriginal, African Nova Scotian and Acadian communities, students with an assortment of primary languages, individuals from a variety of geographic origins and cultural backgrounds; students as diverse as the communities we will be serving.²

While we are fortunate to have a number of ongoing initiatives involving faculty, staff and students promoting the importance of diversity in medicine (e.g., Changing Worlds: Diversity and Healthcare, Aboriginal Health Initiative, and Diversity in Medicine) we are still far away from success in this area. The idea of “checking the box” is a subtle reminder that members of historically marginalized groups still face barriers in the line of further education in health professions such as medicine.

Jennifer Ahmed
Dalhousie Medical School, Class of 2008

References

1. Ayeni B. Position Papers: Diversity and Medicine in Canada <http://www.cfms.org/representation/papers_view.cfm?id=12&what_section=representation>. Accessed 03/30. Canadian Federation of Medical Students, Canada, 2004.
2. Statistics Canada. 2001 Census of Canada <<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/home/index.cfm>>. Accessed 03/30. Statistics Canada, Canada, 2005.