

## **MEDICAL AND HEALTH PROFESSION**

### **Enhancing Student Recruitment and Retention**

#### **CHALLENGE**

Many nations struggle with recruiting and retaining health professionals in underserved communities.

#### **CURRENT STUDENT RECRUITMENT, SELECTION, AND ADMISSION CONTEXT**

One significant factor contributing to this challenge is the recruitment, admission, and student selection process for health profession programs. In most regions globally, student selection is primarily based on academic performance. Scholarships are often awarded based on academic excellence, which may overlook other critical attributes predictive of future service in underserved areas.

Research indicates that multiple factors can effectively predict students' motivation to practice in underserved communities. Institutions striving for social accountability have implemented various strategies to address this issue. These include adopting quota systems that create opportunities for students from rural or underrepresented populations to serve their communities after graduation, fostering community engagement through involvement and targeted marketing strategies, and employing psychometric tests to assess personal attributes such as empathy and strong interpersonal skills.

Medical and health profession institutions aiming to be socially accountable can use these strategies to identify students with attributes and backgrounds that predict their commitment to work in areas with high or unique needs, particularly underserved regions. However, in some countries, institutions have limited influence over admissions, as selection processes are conducted at the national level, or universal criteria for entrance into medical and health profession schools may not exist after secondary education.

#### **STUDENT RECRUITMENT, SELECTION, AND ADMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **Policy Recommendation:**

A school or faculty should implement a policy guiding its recruitment, selection, and admission practices. For example, the Canadian Accreditation Standards state:

“A medical school, in accordance with its social accountability mission, has effective policies and practices in place and engages in ongoing, systematic, and focused recruitment and retention activities to achieve mission-appropriate diversity outcomes among its students, faculty, senior academic and educational leadership, and other relevant members of its academic community.”

These activities include the use of effective policies, practices, programs, and partnerships aimed at achieving diversity among qualified applicants for medical school admission, as well as the evaluation of diversity outcomes outlined in the Canadian Accreditation Standards.

##### **Practice Recommendation:**

Admission or student selection committees should include key stakeholders, such as members of underserved or marginalized populations, and strive to meet the standards and indicators outlined in the [Indicators for Social Accountability Tool](#).

*Standard:*

The student body reflects the socio-demographic and other characteristics of the communities and regions the institution serves, especially underserved populations and those most likely to serve these areas.

*Indicators of Student Recruitment and Selection:*

- The proportion of qualified learners from the populations and regions the institution serves.
- Effective outreach and pathway programs in underserved communities that include learners from those areas and track their outcomes.
- Explicit admission pathways and educational support for learners from underserved populations who may require additional assistance to succeed.
- Diversity in admission committee membership and community involvement at all levels.
- Comparable attrition, progress, and completion rates between learners from underserved populations and the general student body.
- Scholarships and bursaries to support students whose socioeconomic status limits their access to educational opportunities.
- An action plan for advocating university or national policy reforms to align student recruitment with social accountability goals.

*Indicators of Student Support:*

- Scholarships specifically for students from underserved communities.
- Comprehensive support services, including counseling, remedial programs, and mental health support for all students.

## CONCLUSION

Addressing the challenge of recruiting and retaining health professionals, particularly in underserved communities, requires medical and health profession institutions to adopt socially accountable policies for student recruitment and selection. These policies must prioritize socio-economic, ethnic, and geographical diversity by incorporating targeted outreach programs, scholarships, and robust educational support for underrepresented populations. The inclusion of community representatives in selection committees ensures alignment with local needs and perspectives.

Institutions should also implement systematic strategies such as quota systems, psychometric assessments for essential personal attributes, and policies that promote equity in student retention, progress, and completion rates. Regular monitoring and evaluation of these initiatives are critical to fostering a diverse and community-responsive student body.

By embracing these approaches, institutions can enhance healthcare access and equity, address workforce shortages in underserved areas, and develop a resilient, culturally competent workforce. This, in turn, strengthens health systems and improves outcomes for communities worldwide.

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