

The Northeast Ohio Medical University: Increasing student diversity and the primary care workforce

The Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED) analyzed medical student outcomes by admissions pathway with the aim of increasing student diversity and entry into primary care fields. The differences among the pathways were startling. NEOMED found that the original 6- and 8-year B.S./MD pathways did not yield a diverse group of students with career goals that would meet workforce needs, and that other pathways were more effective at achieving these goals. This information allowed the school to expand pathways that were most closely aligned with their mission.

CHALLENGE

Graduate a diverse group of physicians committed to primary care

Getting medical students to pursue primary care fields has dogged medical school deans and workforce experts for many years. Only 12 percent of medical graduates nationwide enter primary care residencies,¹ and by 2025 the U.S. will face a [shortage of up to 35,600 primary care physicians](#). Although many factors influence students' career choices, decades of evidence supports the link between student body diversity and primary care specialty choice.

SOLUTION

Evaluate student diversity and career choice by pathway

NEOMED offers [several pathways to admission](#): the six-year and eight-year B.S./M.D. programs, the post-baccalaureate/M.D. pathway, and direct admission. The composition of students admitted through each pathway, however, varies dramatically. Upon analyzing their student data, NEOMED found that:

- Only 5.8 percent of applicants to the 6-year B.S./M.D. program were underrepresented minorities, compared to 34.4 percent of post-baccalaureate/M.D. applicants.
- More than half (54%) of applicants in the 8-year B.S./M.D. program were first-generation college students, compared to 0.6 percent of direct entries.
- Approximately 50 percent of students in the post-baccalaureate/M.D. pathway entered a family medicine residency, compared to 6.9 percent of students admitted directly to medical school.

RESULTS

Maximize admissions pathways that produce more student diversity and primary care graduates

In response to these data, NEOMED decided to phase out the accelerated 6-year B.S./M.D. pathway, add a 7-year pathway (3 years undergraduate, 4 years medical school), and expand the post-baccalaureate/M.D. pathway. Aligning admissions pathways in this way helps NEOMED better meet its primary care mission and produce graduates that meet local workforce needs. NEOMED also created their own [institutional dashboard](#) to monitor the outcomes of each pathway going forward.

“Measuring success is always a challenge because everyone has his own opinion about what success looks like. Some believe we should graduate a workforce that is 100 percent minorities, with all graduates practicing in Cleveland. Others say success is educating low-income students from disadvantaged communities, regardless of race or ethnicity. Still others say it’s not simply the composition of the workforce that matters, but also serving patients who do not have reliable access to care. As a leader, I look at all of these attributes and more, but my one overarching measure of success is the health of our community.”

Jay A. Gershen, DDS, PhD
President, NEOMED

LESSONS LEARNED

- Some admissions pathways are more attractive and accessible to underserved students than others.
- There are clear patterns in career choice across pathways. Students participating in post-baccalaureate programs prior to entering medical school are choosing family medicine and primary care fields at higher rates than their peers.
- Tracking student diversity and career choice data was essential to the decision-making process, and will help the school keep its admissions pathways aligned with its goals going forward.

ABOUT THE NORTHEAST OHIO MEDICAL UNIVERSITY

Northeast Ohio Medical University, through education, research and service, improves the health, economy and quality of life of the diverse communities of Northeast Ohio. Our values are reflected in the Six Cs of our educational, research and work environment: Competence, Communication, Caring, Curiosity, Character and Community.

ABOUT THE NEOMED-CSU PARTNERSHIP FOR URBAN HEALTH

[Cleveland State University \(CSU\)](#) has partnered with [Northeast Ohio Medical University \(NEOMED\)](#) to pioneer an innovative, evidence-based model of medical and health professional education that promises to broaden the diversity of the healthcare workforce. The [NEOMED-CSU Partnership for Urban Health](#) seeks to improve health outcomes for residents of traditionally underserved urban communities; reduce health disparities among neighborhoods based on racial, ethnic or economic differences; and reinvigorate the region's stagnant economy.

To learn more about NEOMED's efforts, please contact Erik Porfeli at eporfeli@neomed.edu.

ENDNOTES

¹ NRMP (2014). *Results and Data: 2014 Main Residency Match*. <http://www.nrmp.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Main-Match-Results-and-Data-2014.pdf>

² AAMC (2016). *The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand: Projections from 2014 to 2025*. https://www.aamc.org/download/458082/data/2016_complexities_of_supply_and_demand_projections.pdf

³ See Lakhan and Laird, 2009; Lakhan, 2003; Komaromy et al, 1996; Keith, Bell, Swanson & Williams, 1985