

UC Davis School of Medicine appoints Director of Student Diversity

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As part of its continuing effort to ensure a student body and physician workforce that better reflects the demographics of California, UC Davis School of Medicine has named Darin Latimore as its first director of student diversity. He begins his new position on July 1

Latimore, a 1994 graduate of the UC Davis School of Medicine, will work in the school's Office of Medical Education to provide a bridge of support for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds or who have been marginalized because of sexual orientation or gender identity. The position will focus on the processes for both outreach and admissions, with an emphasis on premedical students who need expert guidance in achieving their goal of being accepted into medical school.

"We know that only when our school and its students fully reflect the diversity of this state will we be able to produce the physicians needed to address the disparities facing our health-care system today," said Jesse Joad, associate dean for Diversity and Faculty Life. "Creating an office dedicated to student diversity, and recruiting Dr. Latimore to lead it, are important steps in addressing the challenges we face. Having been a student here, he understands what it will take to recruit the talent and diversity we seek at UC Davis."

Latimore's role includes being part of the school's admissions committee, which in recent years has revised the process for considering student applications so that socioeconomic barriers could become part of the assessment when looking at an applicant's potential. He also plans to travel regularly to campuses throughout California, with a special emphasis on visiting schools comprised of students from communities underrepresented in medicine.

The new position will support a variety of other well-established efforts under way within the School of Medicine and with partners in the community to produce a more diverse student body and physician workforce for California. In 2007, for example, the school for the first time expanded the number of students in its incoming class by more than 10 percent, recruiting a diverse group of students focused on meeting the unique health-care needs of rural communities. Through an award-winning curriculum, students learn about the impact of culture on the practice of medicine and gain competency in interacting with diverse patient populations. A specialized postbaccalaureate program improves the academic profiles of applicants who may have a strong interest in practicing in medically underserved communities, and extensive outreach to middle- and high-school students aims to build awareness and appreciation for careers in science and medicine.

Having first-hand knowledge of the challenges facing students from minority communities, Latimore plans to advise and mentor students throughout their medical school careers to help them address academic and personal issues that could affect school choice and performance.

"I know from experience that simply making the decision to 'go away to school' can be extremely difficult for some students," said Latimore, "Kids from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often contribute to their family's household income like I did during my undergraduate years. I understand that choosing a university isn't always about its faculty and facilities, so my job will be to help prospective students see the big picture of truly being able to help their families and communities by attending a school like UC Davis and becoming a terrific physician."

Latimore's position is specifically designed so he can help those students who haven't always had a strong advocate in their academic pursuits. He will meet all disadvantaged candidates on their interview day and provide personal insights about his decision to attend UC Davis and complete his residency here.

"One of the reasons why establishing and maintaining diversity within a medical school has been

challenging is that students underrepresented in medicine have not always had the academic support they needed to succeed," added Joad. Dr. Latimore can speak from experience, and his new position provides a key element for success.

For the past 11 years, Latimore has been an internist with Kaiser Permanente in south Sacramento, where he had a general medicine practice and specialized HIV/AIDS patient care. He also helped direct medical education at Kaiser, writing and approving resident and student-related policies and procedures.

UC Davis Health System is an integrated, academic health system encompassing UC Davis School of Medicine, the 577-bed acute-care hospital and clinical services of UC Davis Medical Center, the 800-member physician group known as UC Davis Medical Group, and the proposed Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing.