



Fostering a Diverse Physician Workforce

Canada's diversity is multifaceted and remarkable. Our people live in small communities within the Arctic Circle, mountain villages in the Rockies, farm communities, densely populated cities, harbour villages and countless other settings across the nation. Our people are equally diverse in terms of cultural and ethnic origin. Aboriginal populations have been joined by migratory waves from Europe, the Far East, Africa and all corners of the globe. Our history and geography make us, arguably, the most diverse nation on the planet.

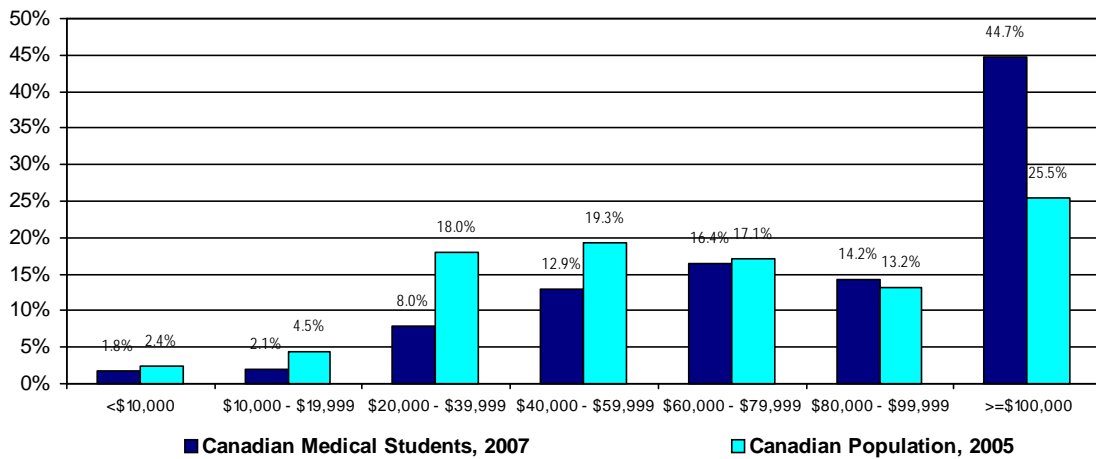
Acknowledging the Canadian mosaic, and acting on their commitment to social accountability, Canada's faculties of medicine are taking steps to foster a physician workforce that mirrors our population. As a start, we are beginning to measure how our medical students compare to the Canadian population across various diversity dimensions.

We want to know, for example, if Canadians from all socioeconomic and ethnic groups are pursuing medical careers. To measure our performance in this area we've looked at the family incomes of medical students in comparison to those of Canadian families. As shown in Figure 1, medical students come from all family income categories, but they are more likely to come from higher-income families. Almost 45% of medical students report coming from families with annual income of \$100,000 or more, compared to about 26% of all Canadians.

We have also looked at diversity by studying visible minority distributions among medical students and the entire Canadian population. As with family income, we see all visible minority groups represented among medical students (see Figure 2). However, Black, Filipino and Latin American peoples tend to be relatively less present among the medical student population.

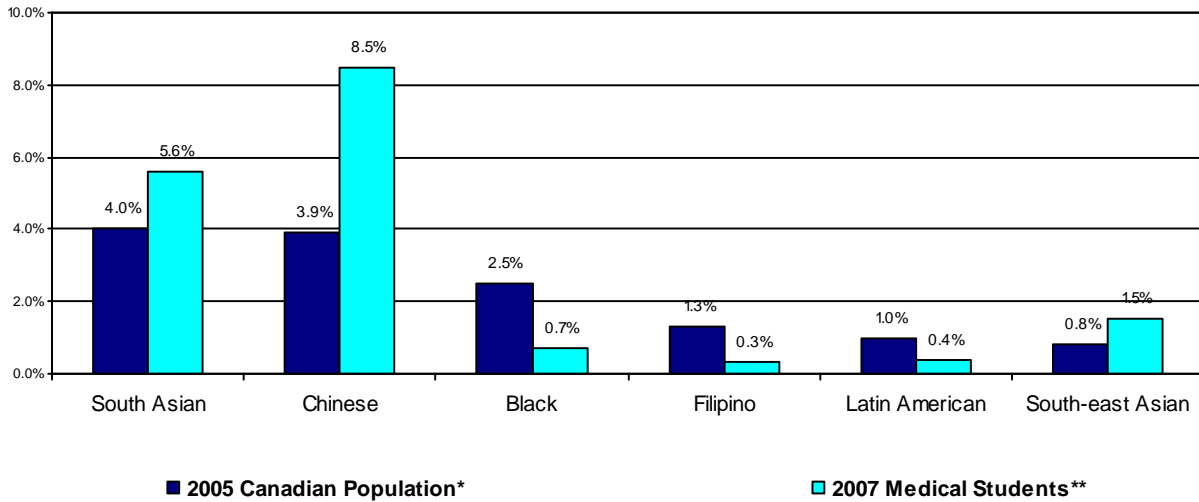
Canada's Faculties of Medicine are taking the initiative in measuring diversity and, more importantly, we are determined to take positive steps to foster a diverse physician workforce. In its recent report on the Future of Medical Education in Canada, the AFMC acknowledged that "Faculties of Medicine must recruit, select, and support a representative mix of medical students...This will involve, for example, addressing perceived and real barriers to medical education, such as the high debt loads of medical graduates." While medical educators share a vision of enhanced diversity, we also know that many partners will have to work together to achieve the vision. **The AFMC calls on the federal government to establish a fund to create pipeline programs to prepare and inspire talented high school and undergraduate students from under-represented or disadvantaged communities to pursue careers in medicine and in health-related research. These pipeline programs would include several elements: (a) summer programs for undergraduate students who have completed their first or second year in university, or who are graduating from high school and have been accepted into a Canadian university to help build their knowledge base and academic skills for success in a medical program, (b) research, education, and mentoring experiences with physicians from under-represented communities, (c) opportunities for high school students to participate in summer research projects with health and biomedical researchers, and (d) stipends to help students from under-represented communities defray the costs of tuition for their first undergraduate degree. It is estimated that this initiative would cost \$2M per year.**

Figure 1: Annual Income Distribution of Canadian Families and the Families of Canadian Medical Students



Sources: 2007 National Physician Survey: Medical Student Questionnaire. College of Family Physicians of Canada, Canadian Medical Association, Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada; Statistics Canada - 2006 Census. Catalogue Number 97-563-XCB2006018.

Figure 2: Visible Minority Groups Among Medical Students, Year 2 Postgraduate Medical Trainees and the General Population, Canada



* Statistics Canada, censuses of population, 2006; ** 2007 National Physician Survey. The College of Family Physicians of Canada, Canadian Medical Association, The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

Note: The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as 'persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.' South Asian includes, for example, 'East Indian,' 'Pakistani,' 'Sri Lankan,' etc. South-east Asian includes, for example, 'Vietnamese,' 'Cambodian,' 'Malaysian,' 'Laotian,' etc.