



Student-Led Organizations Advocating for Inclusivity in Healthcare and Healthcare Professions

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Highlights from the Joining Hands in Healthcare Club, High Point University, High Point, NC, United States

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INTRODUCTION

Joining Hands in Healthcare club was founded at High Point University (HPU) in 2020. Membership to the club is open to all students pursuing health care professions across the undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate programs at HPU. Currently, membership is made up of undergraduate students in the Exercise Science program, as well as Pharmacy, Physical Therapy, Physician Assistant, and Athletic Training graduate students. To date, there are thirty-nine active members of the club. According to research conducted by the U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, and National Center for Health Workforce Analysis in relation to the profession of Physical Therapy. . . 22.2% are split between Black, Asian, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders, and other races. (HRSA Health Workforce, 2017) The mission of Joining Hands in Healthcare club is to provide a sense of community and support in order to improve the wellbeing, mental health, grades, and prosperity of racial and ethnic minority students pursuing healthcare professions at High Point University.

BRIDGING THE GAP/CURRENT INITIATIVES

This club has been a platform in which the student officers have been able to bridge the gap between undergraduate and graduate students pursuing healthcare professions. The club has organized several events in order to promote conversations between members as well as post-graduate professionals. Various health care workers, all identifying as minorities, were asked to speak on virtual panels pertaining to different topics. These topics included “Changes in clinical practice since the COVID-19 pandemic and how students can adapt” as well as “Transitioning from student to healthcare professional and overcoming imposter syndrome.” Between the two events, a total of fifty-five people attended. Through these panels, students were able to gather virtually which helped to stimulate discussions amongst one another. Both the panelists and students offered unique perspectives on methods to navigate the topic at hand, as well as techniques on coping with current social dilemmas. Holding these virtual events throughout the global COVID-19 pandemic has provided a sense of community for members, evidenced by comments of appreciation made during the panel and feedback from those who attended. These environments allowed students to feel comfortable and safe in sharing their difficulties and resolutions knowing others have experienced similar situations.

Currently, club officers are working closely with faculty members to highlight the significance of recognizing implicit biases and discrimination, as it not only can have detrimental impacts on the

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success, mental health, and general well-being of minority students, but also can impact minority patient care. In order to collaborate with faculty to highlight the importance of the effects of implicit biases and discrimination within an institutional setting, the club is looking to host a student-led panel with faculty members in attendance. The student panel and attendees will address and discuss their personal experiences with microaggressions in professional and academic settings in order to raise awareness of this common experience within minority populations. Other notable initiatives will include community outreach events that look to serve and educate marginalized groups within the immediate area surrounding High Point University. Through this outlet, it is our mission for students to find better success and confidence in becoming a minority professional.

DISCUSSION

In addition to the local success of health professional students, Joining Hands in Healthcare's ongoing goal is to advocate for minority communities. The Health Professionals for Diversity Coalition asserts that we can effectively improve the health outcomes of racial and ethnic minorities by "increasing the diversity of the healthcare workforce. (Health Professionals for Diversity Coalition, n.d.)" They further explain that minority health care workers that identify as Asian American, Hispanic, and Native American often are more likely to practice within marginalized and underserved communities. By improving the diversity within the healthcare workforce, we can better address health disparities experienced by racial minorities. It is interesting how the current trend within the U.S. population is becoming more diverse, and yet the healthcare workforce does not reflect this trend. For example, research conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, and National Center for Health Workforce Analysis workforce analysis shows that 77.8% of Physical Therapists are white. (HRSA Health Workforce, 2017) The lack of diversity among healthcare workers may pose difficulties for minorities seeking resolution to health issues as minority individuals often seek out healthcare professionals that are similar to their own identity. The importance of the framework of the Joining Hands in Healthcare club is imperative not only to the success of students, but to the longevity of minority individuals.

When investigating the reasons as to why the healthcare workforce lacks diversity, one of the key reasons according to research by Toretsky, Mutha, and Coffman at the Health force Center at UCSF was the "lack of racially/ethnically concordant

mentors" with a student's identity. (Toretsky et al., 2018) As a result, students who identify as a minority often have difficulties balancing academics and being advocates for their communities. As a club, Joining Hands in Healthcare has provided a support system and mentorship opportunities. Members aid and provide advice to one another on how to cope with the unique societal struggles that accompany being a minority while also being a student. This mentorship system within the club has been a pillar of student success in educational and personal aspects of member's lives. Future implications of Joining Hands in Health Care could serve as a channel for the APTA *PT Moves Me Ambassador* Program. The *PT Moves Me Ambassador* Program is aiming to "Raise awareness of the profession of physical therapy. Recruit the next generation of physical therapists and physical therapist assistants. Increase diversity within the applicant pool, and ultimately the profession." (American Physical Therapy Association, n.d.) The goal of Joining Hands in Health Care is largely aligned with such a program (American Physical Therapy Association, n.d.).

CONCLUSION

As evidence highlights, healthcare professionals of color are underrepresented in the workforce for various reasons. To aid in improving the longevity of minority individuals and provide a space where racial and ethnic minority students feel welcomed and able to succeed, clubs such as Joining Hands in Healthcare are necessary to provide support and mentorship. The emergence of these programs may lead to improvements in diversity within the healthcare workforce, prosperity and wellbeing of minority students, and healthcare outcomes for minority communities. We will aim to provide community outreach, leadership, networking opportunities, and mentorship to break the barriers limiting prevalence of underrepresented minorities in healthcare. Our hope is to encourage other universities and healthcare programs to begin initiatives similar to that of Joining Hands in Healthcare in order to support students of color and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

LY and CK contributed to the organization, construction, and development of the first draft of the manuscript. KQ and MW wrote sections of the manuscript and contributed to revision and editing of the manuscript. All authors contributed to manuscript revision, read, and approved the submitted version.

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