



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

STRENGTHENING THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK

Leadership in Research, Career Advancement, and Education

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February 12, 2010

Dr. Garth Graham
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Minority Health
Office of Minority Health
1101 Wootton Parkway, Suite 600
Rockville, MD 20852

Dear Dr. Graham:

During this critical time when the nation is focusing its attention on the opportunity for real health care reform, I write to commend you and the Office of Minority Health for showing exemplary leadership on issues relating to minority health, including the need to reduce disparities in health care. As Executive Director of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), a nonprofit national association representing more than 3,000 individual members as well as 650 graduate and undergraduate programs of professional social work education, I would also like to thank you for your efforts in developing the National Plan for Action. I submit the following comments on the current draft.

CSWE is deeply invested in and supportive of activities and programs designed to address the health care needs of minority populations. One of our primary focuses is on creating and sustaining a diverse workforce equipped with the skills required to serve vulnerable populations from all backgrounds and circumstances. By increasing both the overall size of the health care workforce and specifically the number of minorities represented within the workforce, the quality of health care in this nation will be enhanced dramatically. Evidence has shown that ethnic and racial minority health professionals practice in underserved areas at a higher rate than non-minorities, and a direct positive relationship exists between the numbers of ethnic and racial minority health professionals, particularly in mental health, and the utilization of needed services by ethnic and racial minorities.

Overall, the National Plan identifies important objectives, such as improving cultural and linguistic competency. This particular objective is a high priority for CSWE in that it connects to creating and sustaining a diverse workforce. CSWE strongly supports the inclusion of all of the strategies that fall under this objective, and specifically the following two, which support recruitment and training needed to provide the appropriate care to individuals from all backgrounds:

Strategy 13: Workforce Training – Develop and support broad availability of cultural and linguistic competency training for physicians, other health professionals, and administrative workforces that are sensitive to the cultural and language variations of racially and ethnically diverse communities.

Strategy 14: Diversity – Increase diversity and competency of the healthcare and administrative workforces through recruitment and retention of racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse individuals and through leadership action by healthcare organizations and systems.

Allow me to now highlight the benefit of implementing this objective, and relating strategies, through providing increased access to education and training. The Title VII health professions programs administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) are designed to support and strengthen the creation of the health care workforce by increasing the recruitment and retention of individuals and improving their access to the education and training needed to obtain a degree to practice as a health professional. These loan forgiveness, scholarship, and training programs provide encouragement for individuals, specifically those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to enter a health profession school or training program, and work through to completion.

Currently, the draft National Plan for Action does not mention the Title VII health professions programs as a means for improving minority health, even though these programs are an important piece of the larger puzzle. As you work to finalize the National Plan and begin its implementation, I urge you to incorporate the Title VII health professions programs.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or my government relations staff (wendy@lewis-burke.com) if you have any questions or if we can be of assistance during your continued work on these important issues.

Again, thank you for your dedication to addressing these critical challenges.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julia M. Watkins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julia Watkins, PhD
Executive Director, Council on Social Work Education