

Widening Participation in Medicine: The Impact of Medical Student-Led Conferences for Year 12 Pupils [Letter]

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Dear editor

I read with great interest the paper by Ryan et al looking at the impact of a widening participation (WP) initiative for year 12 pupils.¹ The study found that two medical student led conferences with appropriate mentoring for students significantly increased their confidence with regards to becoming a doctor amongst other domains. As a medical student at King's College London I would like to congratulate the conference organisers for planning and executing the concept and I would like to offer my perspective as a London based student.

WP initiatives can be broadly divided into those aimed at the pre-application, application, and post application stages of the undergraduate application process.² Universities run WP initiatives for their medical degree programmes, for example King's College London runs an extended medical degree programme aimed primarily at state-school educated pupils which has been running for two decades.³ Therefore, it is no surprise that this has been followed by medical student led initiatives in this field like the ones done by Ryan et al.

The study by Ryan et al measured the impact of their interventions on various domains by using confidence scores before and after the events. However, no domain looked at confidence changes with regards to approaching the actual application process. In the future it would be useful to analyse the impact of such interventions on student confidence in taking the university admissions tests as this is a crucial part of the process. Indeed, a multi-cohort study found that students from independent schools had higher entry test scores on the University Clinical Aptitude test (UCAT).⁴ However, the state school students in this study were twice as likely to finish in the 10% of their graduating cohort. This suggests that the inequality in performance is greater before university and is levelled up to some extent by the end of the course. Therefore, more focus is required to support such students at the admissions stage, and it is vital to look at the effect of WP interventions at this stage.

The study by Ryan et al used certain WP flags as inclusion criteria for one of the conferences. Surprisingly students whose parents are in the medical profession are over 20 times more likely to become doctors compared to students whose parents aren't in the profession.⁵ Perhaps this can justify having one of the WP flags as "no doctors in the immediate family" in future studies. Amongst numerous benefits,

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parents as doctors can provide easy routes into work experience which is desirable by universities. Therefore, going forwards we need to work to increase the confidence of students who think they are unlikely to be successful just because there are no doctors in the family.

Overall, the work done by the study authors is particularly commendable and provides a catalyst for change. But going forwards more work needs to be done to address the above-mentioned issues because medical students are in a unique position to mentor junior students as they have recently been through the whole admissions process.

Disclosure

The author reports no conflicts of interest in this communication.

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