

## Reducing Health Disparities in Communities of Color: Perspectives from Professions in Healthcare

### Presentation Abstract/Summary:

While people of underrepresented ethnic groups (URGs) represent 40% of the nation's population, less than 5% of admissions to PT, OT, and SLP programs are students from URGs. Suggestions for this disparity include lack of academic, social, financial, and mentoring support as barriers to enrolling URGs in health professions programs.

Research indicates that health care providers who are from URGs are more likely to serve patients of color, indigent patients, and work in medically underserved communities. In addition, patients are more likely to report greater satisfaction with care from providers that share their racial/ethnic background.

This presentation includes our initiative to address the lack of diversity in healthcare through a program we have developed named TRIUMPH- the Tennessee Recruitment to Increase Underrepresented Minorities into Professions of Health. This program is designed to serve as a UT system pipeline to increase URGs admissions from UT Knoxville into the UTHSC Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Speech-Language Pathology programs. This ultimately will assist in healing and health in communities of color.

### Learning Outcomes:

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

- Understand why increasing the number of black health care professions is important in manifesting hope, health, and healing in Tennessee and in the nation.
- Identify barriers black students have in their journey to becoming health care professionals.
- Explain ways the TRIUMPH program at UTHSC intends to reduce those barriers to admission Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Speech-Language Pathology programs at UTHSC.

### Presentation Outline

- The state of representation of persons of color in health care professions and its impact on communities of color
- Barriers that contribute to lack of representation in health care professions
- Explanation of the TRIUMPH program developed at UTHSC to increase representation of URGs in PT/OT/SLP programs which will ultimately assist with health and healing in communities of color.

### Presentation Relationship to Conference Theme

Lack of health care professionals that share the racial/ethnic background of their patients is affecting health and healing in communities of color. Creating a more congruent strategy to increase the admission

of underrepresented racial/ethnic groups in health care programs will assist in the manifestation of hope, health, and healing in the black community.

#### Presenter Biographies

E. Shannon Hughes, PT, DPT, EdD, OCS, MTC is currently an Associate Professor and Chair of the Admissions Committee in the Department of Physical Therapy at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, where she also graduated with her Masters of Physical Therapy in 2001. She completed her Doctor of Physical Therapy from the University of St. Augustine in 2007. Her physical therapy clinical background is in outpatient orthopedics and manual therapy. She received both her Orthopedic Certified Specialization (OCS) and her Manual Certification (MTC) in 2006. She completed her Doctor of Education from the University of Memphis with a focus in Adult Education. In 2020, she and her team were awarded the OneUT Grant on their initiative, TRIUMPH, which aims to increase underrepresented groups into professions of health. Dr. Hughes' other research interests include MSK injuries, use of dry needling and the admissions processes in physical therapist education.

Myra M. Meekins PT, DPT, PhD, OCS, FAAOMPT is an assistant professor and physical therapist at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center. Dr. Meekins received her Bachelor of Science in physical therapy from Tennessee State University, her post-professional doctorate in physical therapy from Regis University, and her PhD in Orthopaedic and Sports Science from Rocky Mountain University of Health Professions. She is fellowship trained in orthopaedic manual physical therapy and in movement system impairments. Dr. Meekins is also board certified as a clinical specialist in orthopaedic physical therapy. Her current research endeavors include increasing diversity in physical therapy programs, facilitating the integration of evidence-based practice in clinical decision making, and the analysis of movement impairments.

Additional presenters for this presentation are all professors in the Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Speech-Language Pathology programs at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center (UTHSC).

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<https://www.uthsc.edu/health-professions/physical-therapy/about/hughes.php>

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