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Medical Schools: Not Like Others

Three Suggestions to sharpen Focus

By Myles Sheehan, M.D., S.J.

The mission of any medical school in the United States is to prepare students to begin their medical career and be ready for the challenges of postgraduate medical education. In fulfilling this mission medical schools have distinctive characteristics that not only allow them to ensure that graduates are competent to begin the next phase of training, but also include the cultivation of particular areas of emphasis that reflect the commitments of the school. The four Jesuit medical schools in the United States—Creighton, Georgetown, Loyola Chicago, and St. Louis—have distinctive programs in ethics, biomedical research, service opportunities for students and graduates, and other programs that are consonant with the larger mission of Jesuit education. All four schools do well; I believe there are opportunities to do better and create the opportunity for a greater contribution to American health care, the needs of the poor, and service to the Church. I have three suggestions for a more intentional focus on Jesuit mission in the mission of these schools.

1. First, the schools should engage together in a thoughtful analysis and **strategic planning process**. It should target the potential of Jesuit medical education to change the fabric of American healthcare in ways that are consistent with the Society's mission to serve the faith and engage in the work of creating a more just society. The four Jesuit medical schools, working together, should provide national leadership in: the formation of physicians, the development of distinctive areas of research that would help the underserved and marginalized,

bringing Ignatian spirituality and our traditions of faith into contact with the promises and perils of biomedicine in the twenty-first century.

2. Second, the four Jesuit schools should create shared opportunities in education, research, and service that would facilitate the type of change in American medicine that will **promote justice** and is consistent with our Catholic faith. Nationally, medical schools compete with each other for applicants, research funding, and to provide many separate programs that allow student immersion opportunities in the care of the poor and international service. Imagine the possibilities if the four medical schools stop competing with each other and develop an effective structure that enhances cooperation, in shared areas of biomedical research, ethical analysis, medical education, and the creation of service opportunities.

A pressing example is the lack of minority physicians in American healthcare. Part of the reason is that there need to be effective programs that reach into secondary education, and perhaps even earlier, **to encourage minority students in their work in the sciences** as well as provide opportunities and mentoring in health care careers and biomedical research. A shared program among the four schools, utilizing the resources of Jesuit secondary and college education could lead

Imagine the possibilities if the four medical schools would stop competing with each other.

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Students at Saint Louis University engaged in research in the laboratory.

not only to an increase in minority students in healthcare, but also **provide the kind of distinctive leadership consistent with Jesuit ideals** that the *magis* demands.

3. A third area of mission for the four Jesuit medical schools is the **development of leaders** in American health care who are immersed in Jesuit spirituality and as capable of spiritual reflection as they are trained in advanced medical techniques and the intricacies of basic science. Do the leaders of our Jesuit medical schools understand and work to develop the potential of our schools, our students, and our faculty to grow in personal faith and commitment to careers that express that faith? Are leaders chosen as deans and department chairs who appreciate the heritage of Jesuit education and the goals of the Society in sponsoring medical education? Yes, to both questions. But more attention is urgently needed on these issues, especially as older generations give way to younger persons less aware of these concerns.

Physicians and scientists outstanding in their habits of self-reflection, ethical analysis, and service should be the leaders of our schools in the future. The four medical schools can provide an incomparable service to the Church by emphasizing the development of physicians and scientists who are

superbly trained in medicine and biomedical science while also spiritually aware and, at least a basic level, theologically literate. Creating the structures, curriculum, leadership training, and spiritual support that will assist in the formation of women and men who are as aware of God and the ways of God in their hearts as they are aware of advances in molecular genetics is a contribution that only the Jesuit schools in the United States can make. Our nation and the Church need articulate, bright, superbly trained physicians and researchers who can provide examples of faith while working for justice in the arena of twenty-first century medicine. A more explicit attention to create the environment where they will be educated and formed is a pressing need.

The goal of our medical schools is not to be like other medical schools. We share the same need as other American medical schools to prepare students for their role as physicians and to expand our knowledge in the biomedical sciences. But many other schools are as successful or more with that goal than are our four Jesuit medical schools. Attending to cooperation and a shared commitment to the service of faith and the promotion of justice in medical education, research, and health care is an unmet need that only the Jesuit schools can answer. If that is not our mission, what is? ■