

Action plan launched to make medical and dental careers more accessible

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NHS Employers is today launching an action plan to tackle discrimination and harassment affecting doctors and dentists.

- 12% of students accepted into medical schools come from households headed by unskilled, partly skilled and skilled manual workers, even though these households make up 40% of the population
- only 24.3% of consultants are women, yet 58% of medical and 56% of dental students are female
- only 22% of consultants come from black or minority ethnic backgrounds, yet well over a third of all doctors and dentists classify themselves in this way

Fourteen organisations have signed up to the action plan, known as Equal Values, Equal Outcomes. These include the Department of Health, the General Medical Council and the General Dental Council. Action points include improving access to medical and dental education, opening up career opportunities, and developing disciplinary procedures that are open and equitable.

"People from a wide and diverse range of backgrounds should be given a chance to train as a doctor or dentist," says NHS Employers head of equality and diversity Carol Baxter. "This action plan is about building on work already begun to ensure they are given that chance and that all dentists and doctors are given equal career opportunities regardless of their religious beliefs, whether they are male or female, come from a minority ethnic background, are disabled or are gay, lesbian or bi-sexual."

"A high proportion of NHS doctors and dentists come from black and minority ethnic backgrounds but many do not reach the highest positions and there are persistent concerns that disciplinary mechanisms discriminate against them. Students whose parents come from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to go to medical or dental school. More than half of dental and medical students are now women but access to flexible working for both male and female doctors and dentists still needs to be greatly improved," says Carol Baxter.

"NHS Employers is committed to putting equality and diversity at the heart of the NHS. If we are to succeed, we need to work with many different organisations in a co-ordinated way," said Carol Baxter. "Our reward will be a happier, more motivated workforce that better reflects the communities it serves, and so is better able to care for those patients in those communities. To ensure our success, NHS Employers will be setting up a small group of equality and diversity experts to objectively review progress against the action plan in a year's time."

Good practice highlighted in the action plan

The Newham Opportunity Scheme offers a year-long work placement at Newham General Hospital for local students whose background may prevent them getting the required A-level grades for medical school. Students from the scheme who show that they can make good doctors are offered a place at Barts and The London Queen Mary's School of Medicine and Dentistry.