

## UNMC helps boost diversity in health care

by Karen Burbach, UNMC public affairs

The Virginia-Nebraska Alliance is one way to help transform America's health professions.

"This is a model that could have a great impact," for African American institutions, as well as Hispanic institutions, said The Hon. Louis Sullivan, M.D., founding dean and first president of Morehouse School of Medicine. "We're very pleased Nebraska is part of this endeavor."



Louis Sullivan, M.D., addresses the crowd as UNMC's Rubens Pamies, M.D., looks on.

Dr. Sullivan touted the Virginia-Nebraska Alliance, a partnership between UNMC and a number of Virginia schools, during his keynote remarks at last month's second annual health conference titled "Eliminating Health Disparities: The Role of Cultural Competency."

"Diversity is a challenge and responsibility for everyone in our society, not simply those in the educational or health professions community," said Dr. Sullivan, who served as secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services from 1989 to 1993 under then-President George Bush.

Today, African Americans, Native Americans and Hispanic Americans make up more than 25 percent of the U.S. population, but represent only 9 percent of nurses, 6 percent of doctors and 5 percent of dentists.

The Sullivan Commission's 2004 report, "Missing Persons: Minorities in the Health Professions," outlined recommendations to get more minority students into the health professions based on three overarching principles:

- The culture of health profession schools must change;
- New and nontraditional paths to the health professions should be explored; and
- Commitments must be at the highest levels in the public and private sector.

The Virginia-Nebraska Alliance, a partnership between UNMC and a number of Virginia schools, is one way to help transform America's health professions, Dr. Sullivan said.

"This is a model that could have a great impact," for African American institutions, Dr. Sullivan said, as well as for Hispanic institutions.

Other members of the Virginia-Nebraska Alliance in attendance were Wally Smith, M.D., professor of medicine and public health and medical director of the Virginia Commonwealth University (Richmond, Va.) Center on Health Disparities, and Terone Green, chief executive officer of the Virginia-Nebraska Alliance. The more than 40 conference attendees spanned the United States from such cities as Baltimore, New

York, Philadelphia, San Antonio, Chicago, Atlanta, and Gainesville, Fla.

"The idea of diversity and cultural competence is very important in having effective delivery of health care services to all of our populations," Dr. Sullivan said, recommending that accrediting bodies embrace diversity and cultural competence as requirements for accreditation.

The Virginia-Nebraska Alliance was founded in September 2004 by Virginia's five Historically Black Colleges and Universities and one community college: Hampton University, Hampton; Norfolk State University, Norfolk; St. Paul's College, Lawrenceville; Virginia State University, Petersburg; Virginia Union University, Richmond; and J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, Richmond. Two additional schools -- the University of Virginia Medical Center and Richmond University in Richmond, Va. -- recently joined the Alliance. Eastern Virginia Medical School also has expressed interest in participating, Dr. Sullivan said. "If they join, all the academic health science centers in Virginia will be a part of the alliance," he said.

As part of the alliance, scholars spend 12 summer weeks in research labs at UNMC. The first group -- eight students and five faculty members -- came to UNMC last summer.

This summer, 10 undergraduate students and four faculty members will be on campus, said Mary McNamee, Ph.D., assistant vice chancellor for academic affairs and director of UNMC's Office of Student Equity and Multicultural Affairs. Six students are working in labs and four are in the Summer Medical & Dental Education Program (SMDEP), a six-week enrichment program for undergraduate college students in Nebraska or around the nation who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, racial and ethnic groups or rural areas.

Following the Virginia-Nebraska Alliance, Dr. Sullivan hopes to establish statewide alliances between higher education institutions, advocate for programs that will provide additional scholarships and low-interest loans for students in the health professions and develop initiatives to bridge high schools, community colleges, baccalaureate institutions and health profession schools.

The Virginia-Nebraska Alliance students and the labs they are working in this summer are as follows:

- Danielle Williams, Hampton University, Jialin Zheng, M.D.
- Kieara Robinson, Virginia Union University, Laurey Steinke, Ph.D.
- Corenthia Mills, Virginia Commonwealth University, Stephen Rennard, M.D.
- Nakiesha Bridgers, Virginia State University, Kay-Ewe Wagner, Ph.D.
- Mercedes Bell, Virginia State University, Thomas Rosenquist, Ph.D.
- Tyrone Cherry, Virginia State University, Dan Sullivan, Ph.D., at the University of Nebraska at Omaha -- working on the Chemistry And Physics On Wheels (CAPOW) van, which allows chemistry, physics, and geology professors to take science to area schools.

The Virginia-Nebraska Alliance students who are involved in the SMDEP are:

- Adekemi Fakulujo, J. Sargent Reynolds Community College
- Tanisha Jones, Virginia State University
- Takeara Powell, Virginia State University

- Vivian Threadgill, J. Sargent Reynolds Community College

The following faculty members are on campus - or will be arriving soon - to work in UNMC labs this summer as part of the Virginia-Nebraska Alliance:

- Dr. John Mbonifor, St. Paul's College - in the lab of Tom Jerrells, Ph.D.
- Dr. Keinya Holmes, Hampton University - in the lab of Kathryn Lawson, Ph.D., and Keith Johnson, Ph.D.
- Dr. Sonya Caston-Pierre, Dillard University and Jackson State University - in the lab of Mark Carlson, M.D.
- Dr. Abiodun Adibi, Hampton University - in the lab of Paul Dunman, Ph.D.

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