

US medical students are rejecting kidney careers

May 5 2011

Kidney disease affects 1 in 9 US adults, and by 2020 more than 750,000 Americans will be on dialysis or awaiting kidney transplant. Despite this growing health problem, every year fewer US medical students adopt nephrology as a career, according to a review appearing in an upcoming issue of the Clinical Journal of the American Society Nephrology (CJASN).

The review by ASN Workforce Committee Chair Mark G. Parker, MD (Division of Nephrology and Transplantation, Maine Medical Center) and colleagues highlights the declining interest of [medical students](#) in the US in nephrology. The authors propose ways to increase interest in nephrology so the US trains a sufficient number of kidney professionals to provide the growing demands of this public health crisis.

Dr. Parker explains that, "in medical school, students primarily work with hospitalized [kidney patients](#), whose care is the most complex and daunting. And many students believe nephrologists to be overworked and underpaid." Nephrology is actually higher paid than a number of specialties, including rheumatology and [hospital](#) medicine.¹ In a survey completed by the American Society of Nephrology (ASN) in 2010, 95% of nephrology fellows indicated they are happy with their career choice.²

Although talented international medical graduates have historically contributed substantially to the US nephrology workforce, it is increasingly difficult for international medical graduates to obtain visas

for the US, and this compounds the problem created by decreasing US medical students' interest in nephrology.

"We must work together to find a way to develop, improve, and market what we know to be a rewarding, stimulating, and fulfilling career," said ASN Councilor Bruce Molitoris, MD, FASN, chair of the ASN's Task Force on Increasing Interest in Nephrology Careers (Indiana University School of Medicine, Nephrology).

ASN has begun to implement strategies to inspire interest in nephrology among US medical graduates. Dr. Parker explains that "ASN will help provide stimulating experiences for trainees, nurture outstanding educators, and use social media to encourage the next generation of students to learn about the importance of [kidney disease](#) and the satisfaction many nephrologists derive from improving kidney care."

ASN will improve efforts to recruit women and minorities, currently underrepresented in the nephrology physician workforce. Gains were made by females, Hispanics, and African Americans entering nephrology fellowships from 2002 to 2009. However, the increases by Hispanic and African American nephrology fellows still trailed gains made by other medical subspecialties.

More information: The article entitled, "The Future Nephrology Workforce: Will There Be One?" will appear online on May 5, 2011, [doi 10.2215/CJN.01290211](https://doi.org/10.2215/CJN.01290211)

Provided by American Society of Nephrology

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