New Graduate Program Focuses on Black Health

A University of Toronto's graduate program aims to improve the quality of care for Black patients, who have long experienced health inequity.

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The University of Toronto has launched a new master's program in Black health, opening doors for the next generation of health providers to help communities affected by centuries of racism, violence and colonization, according to Roberta Timothy, the program's creator and an assistant professor at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health.

"Training folks to not only do better, but to create safer spaces for us to seek health care, and to seek healing and wellness, is the main goal," Timothy said in a CBC News article.

The program will welcome its first group of 10 students next year and will run for two years for full-time students and four years for those studying part-time.

Citing the increasing need for better health care for Black, Indigenous and other minority groups who have faced health care inequity before and during the pandemic, Timothy and other advocates hope that the program will inspire similar initiatives locally and abroad.

"We are doing this to create social change and social justice within our communities, and hopefully others," said Timothy.

The Black Health Alliance pointed out that social determinants in Black communities, such as poor access to jobs and housing, raise Black people's risk of developing chronic diseases, like diabetes. The lack of Black health care workers who understand the special needs and concerns of Black patients only worsens matters, according to the alliance.

The new program will teach students about Black research, treatment and resistance in health care. Students will also have opportunities to work in the field with community organizations. Timothy noted that the program is open to people of all races but hopes to draw Black health professionals.

Angela Robertson, the executive director of the Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre in Toronto, said the program supports and affirms the experiences of Black people within the health

care system while acknowledging that much work remains to be done.

Fatimah Jackson-Best, PhD, an assistant professor at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, said, “These kinds of degree programs, they’re hard fought for, and it’s a hard win to get. But it’s so encouraging."

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