

# Discover Healthcare: Cultivating Interest in Health Careers in Underserved Youth Who Live in the Lehigh Valley

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# Discover Healthcare: Cultivating Interest in Health Careers in Underserved Youth Who Live in the Lehigh Valley

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## Intro/Background

It is well known that there are numerous health care disparities within the United States. A significant contributor to these disparities likely lies in the composition of the health care work force. This is unfortunate since minority health care workers are much more likely to work in underserved areas and minority patients report better care when they see a language- and cultural-congruent healthcare practitioner. The Allentown School District (ASD) is public school district in Allentown, PA where the majority of students are minorities and the median household income is lower than the national average. The district currently partners with the Lehigh County Medical Society to run a Health Careers Club for students who are interested in healthcare.

## Problem Statement

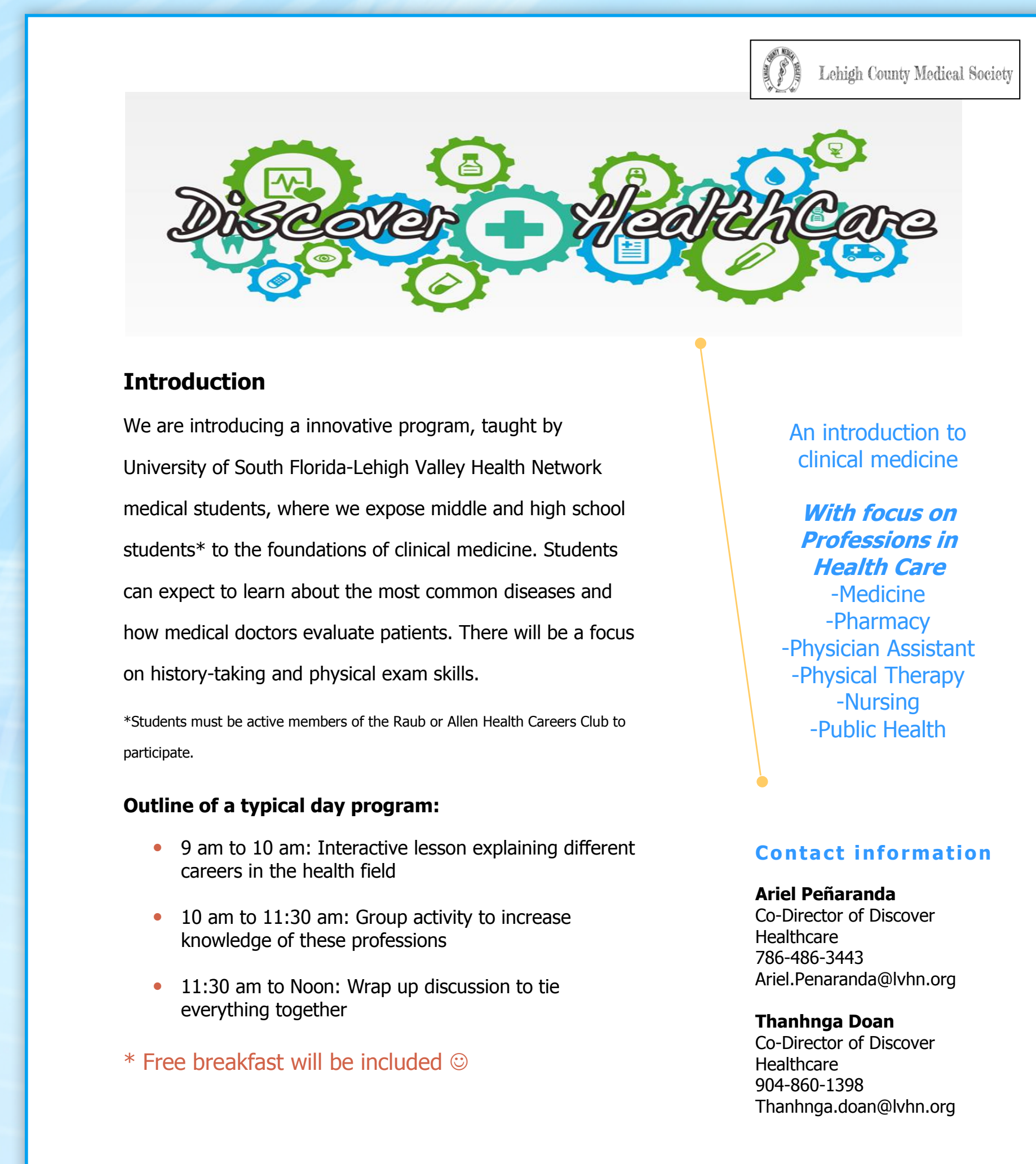
Numerous factors act as barriers to underrepresented minorities entering healthcare careers including lack of positive mentorship and opportunities to engage with these careers before adulthood. Medical students are ideally positioned to offer this critical mentorship and teach crucial skills to underrepresented middle and high school students who are interested in health careers because they have recently been through the process of gaining admission. It hoped that these sessions will increase the interest of these ASD students in healthcare careers.

## Methodology

This project oversaw the creation of Discover Healthcare, a medical-student run, monthly program for ASD students that drew its students from the Health Careers Club. Sessions took place on a monthly basis and lasted 3 hours. Topics such as neuroscience, diabetes, nutrition and trauma care were covered. Each session had a practical component where ASD students would learn skills such as surgical knot tying, auscultation and the neurologic exam. A 7-item Interest in Healthcare survey was administered to the ASD students at the beginning, middle of the year to see if the sessions have increased their interest. There is also a third administration planned at end of the year. Additionally, 10-item pre- and post-quizzes were given during each session to assess comprehension of the material.

## Results

Pre- and post-quiz data for the three sessions thus far analyzed (Trauma, Infectious Diseases and Neuroscience) clearly show a significant difference in scores using pair T-tests. The results of the Interest in Healthcare surveys from the start of this year's program and the midpoint have not shown any significant increase in interest.



The flyer features the title "Discover Healthcare" with a graphic of interlocking gears in green and blue. Below the title, it includes an introduction, a typical day program outline, and contact information for Ariel Peñaranda and Thanhnga Doan.

**Introduction**  
We are introducing an innovative program, taught by University of South Florida-Lehigh Valley Health Network medical students, where we expose middle and high school students\* to the foundations of clinical medicine. Students can expect to learn about the most common diseases and how medical doctors evaluate patients. There will be a focus on history-taking and physical exam skills.

**Outline of a typical day program:**

- 9 am to 10 am: Interactive lesson explaining different careers in the health field
- 10 am to 11:30 am: Group activity to increase knowledge of these professions
- 11:30 am to Noon: Wrap up discussion to tie everything together

\* Students must be active members of the Raub or Allen Health Careers Club to participate.

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## Conclusions and Future Implications

The results of the pre- and post-quiz data suggest that the ASD students are able to learn the material presented during our sessions. The Interest in Healthcare surveys have not yet shown a significant difference and this may be due insufficient time between administrations. Additionally, the scores from the first survey demonstrated that they already had a high interest. The survey may need to be re-designed in the future. Alternatively, future program coordinators may start obtaining data about the educational careers path of the ASD students involved in the program to see if there was any positive effect of the program in the long term.



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