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Personal Experience

Enter the Health Zone: How Summer Camps Introduce Students to Health Care Careers

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Currently, there is a reported critical shortage of health care professionals and the shortage is expected to worsen. Six million health care workers will be needed between 2004 and 2014 due to new jobs and to fill vacant positions as healthcare workers leave their jobs (Martiniano & Moore, 2006). One strategy to decrease this projected shortage is to promote interest in health care professions in students at a younger age (Trossman, 2002).

The Summer Camp for Academically Talented Students (SCATS) has been in existence at Western Kentucky University (WKU) for 25 years. This camp is for students entering the 7th, 8th, or 9th grades. Upon being accepted to SCATS, the students select four courses from a wide variety of classes which they attend for 1 1/2 hours each day during the two-week program. This year the Associate Dean of the College of Health and Human Services (CHHS) at WKU investigated the possibility of having a health related course offered as part of SCATS.

The Department Head of the Baccalaureate and Masters Nursing Program at WKU asked for volunteers to develop and teach a course. Five faculty enthusiastically offered to be part of this adventure. The faculty had an initial organizational meeting to establish a course title and description. They chose "Enter the Health Zone" as the course title and decided the focus would be on a variety of health care careers. Although all faculty had experience with teaching adult learners, they recognized teaching strategies for a younger age group would need to be different. They obtained resources for teaching middle-grade students from the WKU College of Education Library and from educational web sites. They also consulted with a K-12 gifted and talented teacher who advised the faculty to plan at least one hands-on activity each day.

Although faculty attended all sessions, one or two faculty members coordinated each day. Faculty utilized a variety of teaching strategies to enhance student engagement and learning. On the first day the participants were involved in a session focused on "Infectious Diseases." Information was presented about infection control and the value of personal hygiene. Using the GlitterBug® machine, faculty demonstrated the importance of proper handwashing. Students also donned gowns, gloves, and mask. The topic for day two was "Hematology." After delivering a lecture explaining blood cells, blood types, and a few common disorders, faculty used fake blood to demonstrate the blood typing

procedure. This day ended with a visit to a medical laboratory on campus. The medical technologist talked about her role as a member of the health care team and allowed students to view various slides utilizing the microscope.

On day three, the students' focus was directed to the "Musculoskeletal" system. A faculty member provided information about the functions and alterations of muscles, bones, tendons, and ligaments. Other activities on this day included applying a leg cast, a physical therapist as a guest speaker, and visiting a local health clinic where a physician spoke about interpretation of x-rays and an x-ray technician provided information about her role as a member of the health care team.

The topic of focus for day four and five was "Heart and Lung." A faculty member presented a lecture which included details about the function and pathophysiology of the heart and lungs. Students participated in hands-on activities including auscultating heart and lung sounds on mannequins and simulators and operating an automatic electronic defibrillator. A nurse anesthetist visited on day four and provided an overview of his role. Participants also had the opportunity to see examples of equipment utilized in administration of anesthesia. On day five, paramedics arrived and allowed students to tour a live ambulance while they discussed the role and responsibilities of emergency medical technicians and paramedics.

"Oral health" was the focus for day six. A dental hygienist presented detailed information about the oral cavity and some common problems that might occur. Later, the students were able to tour a dental clinic on campus. While at the clinic they were able to manipulate equipment and simulators. They also toured a mobile health unit which included a dental clinic. While on the mobile health unit, students discussed its use by the university in serving the health care needs of rural populations.

On day seven, the focus was the "Gastrointestinal" system. At the beginning of class, an overview of the GI system was provided and then the students were engaged in a "Walk through the GI system." Visual aides demonstrated what happens as food travels through the system. When this was finished, the students went outside and were surprised to see an emergency helicopter land for them to tour. The crew spoke about their roles in emergency medicine and also provided safety practices important for everyone.

On day eight, students visited the Health & Fitness lab on campus and an exercise physiologist discussed the importance of exercise. On day nine, participants played a "Jeopardy-like" game to evaluate learning. Four

teams were established and the top two teams participated in a play off on day ten. On the last day, students displayed posters. Groups consisting of four students worked together choosing a topic for their poster and planning the presentation. At the end of day eight and beginning of day nine, students were given time to work on posters.

To top off the experience, one faculty member compiled photos of all activities and made a video which was shown during the last day. Students were given a copy of the video and a group photograph as a remembrance of the program.

Guest speakers were particularly popular with the students. They liked the variety of professions and information provided. Despite the limitation of having to remain on campus, students experienced a variety of clinical settings and health care professionals. As a result of participating in this program, faculty recognized the value of interactive teaching strategies for engagement of both students and faculty. In conclusion, faculty believe it was a worthwhile event and should be repeated.

References

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