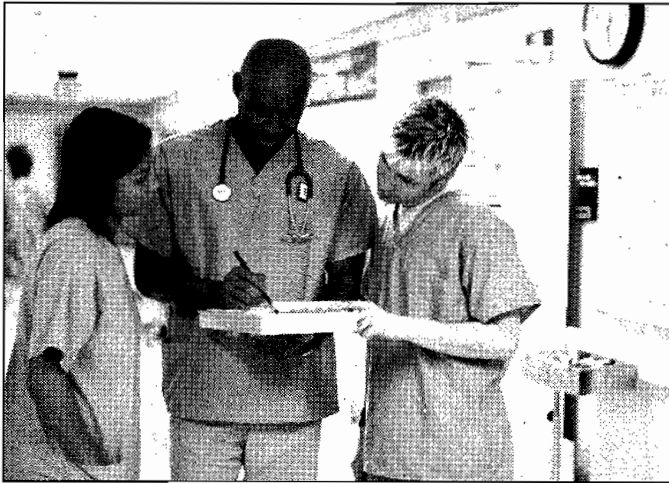


SOME HIGH SCHOOLS PREPARE STUDENTS FOR HEALTHCARE CAREERS

BY JANET HOFF



Many high school students consider their education to be disconnected from their future career goals and prospects for earning money. These students find it difficult to make the learn-to-earn connection and believe their studies have little relevance to their future.

Recognizing the threat of losing these students, secondary school systems are creating career pathways for them to follow over two to four years. Career pathways are sequences of existing courses that provide students with practical skills they can either apply immediately following graduation or continue to develop in college and training programs.

High schools throughout San Diego are now offering ca-

reer pathway sequences specifically for healthcare. Encouraged by the state of California, these pathways are part of a larger network known locally as the *Regional Allied Health and Science Initiative*. State funding is allowing individual school pathway programs to coordinate their efforts with other local programs. The outcome will be a richer educational model, not only for new and developing pathways in San Diego, but also for schools throughout California.

The *Regional Allied Health and Science Initiative* is a collaborative effort to improve high school students' ultimate success in healthcare training programs. Believing the critical foundation to be science, the healthcare pathway course sequence generally includes *Medical Biology*, *Healthcare Essentials*, and *Human Physiology*.

Medical Biology is a new angle on an existing high school science course. Each lesson and laboratory experiment focuses on human systems and medical applications. Students benefit from the highly contextual method of learning which leads

to greater retention of material.

In *Healthcare Essentials* students learn medical terminology. They practice taking vital signs, participate in exercises about diversity and cultural sensitivity, and learn about patient confidentiality and safety. They also meet healthcare professionals who give them insight into various careers.

According to Rhian Purdy, who teaches *Medical Biology* and *Healthcare Essentials* at West Hills High School in Santee, "Learning occurs best when it is contextual. The *Medical and Health Pathway* has provided the opportunity for students to bring meaning to the academic material through purpose. This purpose has a direct relationship with retention and motivation, which I have witnessed in my classes."

Students intrigued by the healthcare industry from a young age are able to explore their interests over several high-school years. By continuing with the pathway sequence, they form positive relationships with peers who are also interested in healthcare. Career pathway teachers seek out activities for students at local colleges and healthcare facilities to encourage follow-through with training programs after high school.

The healthcare industry is facing a growing demand for trained healthcare professionals. Job openings will continue to outnumber qualified workers for years. Many hospital recruiters are forced to look beyond the San Diego region to find the right applicants. Schools that offer a healthcare career pathway are responding to that workforce need.

Young people participating in healthcare career pathways are discovering the wide variety of career options open to them. In addition to becoming doctors or nurses, students discover the great need for professionals such as respiratory therapists and surgical technicians.

Students who have com-

pleted a healthcare pathway sequence, particularly *Medical Biology* and *Human Physiology*, are better prepared to pass college prerequisite science courses and pursue any of the healthcare career options they discovered while in high school.

Students in the healthcare career sequence have demonstrated they can meet the challenges of highly rigorous and relevant coursework. Some pursue immersion activities outside the classroom, including volunteering and job shadowing, to learn even more.

Rose McCracken, a 2006 high school graduate, discusses a summer school course she completed on the sites of Kaiser Permanente and Sharp Grossmont Hospital. "Career immersion programs like the *Health-Careers Exploration Summer Institute (HESI)* are vital to a student's success in future careers," says McCracken. "Through HESI, I discovered that the medical field is not limited to just doctors and nurses, but that it is wide open with career opportunities. The three-week job shadowing experiences at the hospitals led me to pursue a career in nursing. I am now in my first year of the BSN program at Point Loma Nazarene University."

Students who are interested in a healthcare career can approach their middle or high school counselor to inquire about career pathway options. Their parents may also approach the school principal to discuss creating a healthcare career pathway if one does not currently exist.

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