

MASH
July 17, 2007

Students Shadow Medical Professionals at Saint Mary's

The ten-day experience began with orientation: students must attend everyday; students must arrive on-time; students will remain with the group everyday; patient information must remain confidential; no cell phones or pagers in class.

It may have been the start of summer break for most students, but the selected high school students attending the MASH program at Saint Mary's Regional Medical Center had a whole new set of rules to learn during summer break. MASH is a two-week summer medical enrichment experience designed to give interested students a glimpse of health professions by shadowing medical professionals.

This year eleven students were selected to take part in the MASH program. "Every year, incoming sophomore, junior and senior students are encouraged to consider participation in the MASH program," said Linda Blasingame, RN, Clinical Educator at Saint Mary's. "MASH is a program for high school students with an interest in health care careers, and has been developed to inspire and encourage young people to explore the application of scientific concepts to the health care fields."

Through a variety of experiences, the students interact with a large number of health care professionals such as physicians, nurses, medical technologists, radiology technologists, respiratory therapists, pharmacists, dieticians and even veterinarians. Each professional provides students with practical information concerning basic scientific theories related to their fields. Students participate in activities including learning more about anatomy and medical procedures as well as components and functions of the health care team in an interdisciplinary environment. Educational and degree requirements are also discussed at length.

Jack Small, Director of Saint Mary's Surgery Department explained, "We gave the students their first experience of what it might be like to suture a cut or incision. Each student practiced using suturing techniques on the skin of a banana." Michele Leiva, who will be a senior at Ola High School this fall, said, "This experience has inspired me even more to pursue a career in Emergency Medicine or Surgery. This has been an experience I'll never forget." Students spent part of each day in the classroom, and then they got to see medicine in action when the group shadowed various medical professionals.

There is no cost to the student for the program. MASH is a joint effort by Saint Mary's Regional Medical Center and the Central Area Health Education Program at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. Corporate partners who provide operational support include the Arkansas Farm Bureau, the Farm Bureau Women's Council, Blue Cross-Blue Shield of Arkansas, the Rural Electric Cooperatives, Arkansas Power and Light/Entergy, Arkansas Academy of Family Physicians, and the Community Health Centers of Arkansas. Arkansas Farm Bureau also provides direct support for the MASH program at Saint Mary's contributing \$200.00 to help sponsor each student.

"We are very appreciative of the exceptional work of the many organizations whose efforts enable us to offer this experience to students in the River Valley," said Mike McCoy, CEO of Saint Mary's Regional Medical Center. "The MASH program not only gives students the opportunity to experience medicine first hand from a clinician's viewpoint, but also allows our staff to mentor some of our community's brightest young minds."

During the two-week program, students became certified in Basic First Aid and Basic Life Support (CPR). The basic science connection to medical diagnosis and treatment were reinforced through lectures, labs, and clinical interaction.

As a bonus this year, students took a trip to UAMS in Little Rock. “We spent the first week and a half at Saint Mary’s teaching the students about the medical field,” said Blasingame. “We wanted them to see other opportunities in the medical field that can be found at a medical school. It was very rewarding to hear so many of the students say ‘This is where I want to go to school. This is what I want to do’. That’s the moment when I knew we had made a difference.”

The program hopes to encourage youth interested in medical fields to continue their education and then return to rural areas to work. “We have excellent opportunities in the area for talented, caring individuals to work in the healthcare field,” said Mr. McCoy. “Through the MASH program, Saint Mary’s is showing students that they can get a certification, degree or doctorate and return to the River Valley to find a great career in medicine. After all, they are the future leaders of our community.”

Many of the MASH students chose to remain at Saint Mary’s to complete a ten-week summer session as a Volunteen. Saint Mary’s offers summer volunteer opportunities for teens ages 13 through 18 years old. For more information on the Volunteen Program, call Toni Mills at (479) 968-2841. For more information on the MASH program, call Linda Blasingame, RN, at (479) 964-5346.