

## Academy teaches students from St. Peter, area schools more about medical occupations

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Dressed in blue scrubs and wielding large posters, area high school students flooded the halls of St. Peter's River Edge Hospital Wednesday night, setting up for a end-of-the-year open house designed to teach the community more about the area's new medical science academy and the opportunities it provides.

In its third year, the St. Peter-based High-STEP Medical Science Academy teaches students more about careers in healthcare. It also imparts the skills

necessary for success in a college or post-secondary setting. Teaching math and reading skills along with basic anatomy and health science, instructors say students leave well-rounded and prepared for life after graduation.

"In the future, I think that education will kind of go in this direction because we want students to learn the real life skills and learn more about life in the real world," instructor Amanda Bell said.

Open to students from St. Peter, Le Sueur-Henderson, St. Clair, Lake Crystal, Cleveland and Tri-City United and taught in the morning, classes alternate between St. Peter High School and River's Edge Hospital and Clinic. In all, students receive about 50 hours of hands-on, clinical education at the clinic during their first year in the academy, learning about nursing, rehabilitation, and lab, imaging and alternative medicine.

Lectures, materials, quizzes and exams are online, offering students a blended experience that leaves more time for hands-on activity when they meet face-to-face with instructors. Subjects covered include anatomy and physiology, medical terminology, medical ethics, diseases and disorders.

"We teach them anatomy and physiology so they can get a basic idea of how the human body works," Bell said.

Students that are part of the academy for a second year, move on to take more advanced course, taking more specialized courses. Thanks to a partnership with South Central College, they can become certified as nursing assistants or pharmacy techs. They can also take courses in sports medicine.

Internships are also available. Students job shadow for 40 hours during their final semester in the academy, getting to see a real-life health professional in action.

The students are also invited to participate in Health Occupations Students of America or HOSA, a national student organization for future health care professionals.



Glenn Morris, academy director, said the program is unique in that it is partnered with River's Edge Hospital, giving the students the chance to engage with the subjects they are being taught in the classroom.

"It's worked quite well," Morris said. "It's turned a lot of kids on to considerations for careers in health."

"We try to make sure they are college and career ready," Morris said.

Paula Meskan, director of nursing at River's Edge Hospital pairs clinic lessons with material taught in the class. For instance, when learning about skin, the students were given the opportunity to practice suturing by stitching up bananas. When learning about the heart, students got to see a fellow classmate undergo a stress test.

"My portion of it has really just been to coordinate with what they're doing in the classroom," Meskan said.

Tanya Shevtsov, a junior at St. Peter High School, said the class has shown her just how many options are available to students who want to work in healthcare. Choosing sonography as her preferred field, Shevtsov said she is seriously considering a post-secondary education in healthcare.

Taking a staff member's blood pressure, Autumn Johnson said she will be attending the University of Minnesota: Rochester in the fall and hopes to get a bachelor's degree in health sciences.

"High-STEP helped me see that I really want to do this," Johnson said.

Inspired by a pediatric simulation academy students attended at Gustavus Adolphus College, Johnson said she would like to go into pediatric care.

"I've always been interested in the medical field ... and I really like children," Johnson said. "Putting them together gets you pediatrics."

Adam Yeske, interested in cardiology, is a junior at St. Peter High School as well. Surprised by the variety of healthcare field available, he is none-the-less fascinated by the human heart.

"It just hit me one day," Yeske said. "We were learning about the heart in class ... I'm very serious about pursuing this."

But Bell says its OK even if a student isn't interested in healthcare after attending the academy. Students are given a chance to experiment, without having to spend thousands of dollars getting a college education to find out healthcare doesn't suit them.

"That is our whole goal," Bell said.



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