

Students get front row seats to health career opportunities

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BJC School Outreach Program Provides Guidance at Alton Memorial Hospital

ALTON - What if you could get an inside look as a teenager at a future career in health care? You might find that there are more options than you ever dreamed possible. That's what BJC School Outreach and Youth Development hopes area students will learn through the organization's career exploration programs.

One of Sophia Beard's last days as a student at Edwardsville High School last spring was spent shadowing a nurse in Alton Memorial Hospital's Women's Health and Childbirth Center — and it was right where she wanted to be.

“I just love being in a hospital setting, and I've always wanted to be a nurse,” says Beard, who will attend nursing school this fall. “I like caring for kids, particularly the babies, and hope to be a neonatal nurse one day.”

Unlike a lot of graduating seniors, Beard already has a pretty clear picture of her career path, thanks in part to a program offered through her high school in partnership with BJC School Outreach and Youth Development and area hospitals, including Alton Memorial Hospital.

The programs provide area students with front row seats to a variety of career opportunities. These programs include health career talks in classroom settings, job shadowing at area hospitals and with medical professionals in office settings, and extended internships for students with a high interest in health professions.

“With these programs, we have an opportunity to show students how rewarding a career in health care could be for them,” says Jennifer Irvin, MHSA, an educator with BJC School Outreach and Youth Development. “These programs also expose students to other careers in health care beyond being a physician or nurse.”



Irvin works closely with local high schools and BJC hospitals like Alton Memorial Hospital and Barnes-Jewish Hospital to ensure students have unique experiences and knowledge about an array of opportunities — from the bedside on hospital units like OB and ambulatory surgery to behind the scenes in areas like the pharmacy, labs and radiology.

As one of Irvin’s primary hospital contacts, Irene McLaughlin, former volunteer coordinator for Alton Memorial Hospital, ensures that all students who participate in the program complete a mini-orientation regarding HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) and other health care compliance protocols for the safety of the students, patients and the health care professionals across the hospital.

Approximately 25 students go through the orientation each semester, and all of the students complete at least one observation at Alton Memorial Hospital, in addition to two visits to Barnes-Jewish Hospital in the spring and fall, Irvin explains.

“These are very conscientious students who have an opportunity to really see the hospital, and meet our patients and employees,” says McLaughlin. “I think these opportunities allow the students to see what the real world of health care is like, and it’s so beneficial because it helps ensure they are going in the right direction.”

Mikayla Fry, who recently completed her junior year at Edwardsville High School, is the daughter of a BJC employee. She hopes to have a career in medicine and would like to work in pediatrics one day.

“I’ve always been interested in helping people and would like to become a pediatric surgeon,” she says. “Both my medical occupation classes and being able to shadow have been very interesting. It’s been helpful to observe areas that I had never seen, like the Alton Memorial Hospital Wound Care Center, while also learning about areas where I might not be interested as a career option.”

For more information, please call BJC School Outreach and Youth Development at 314-286-0460 or visit bjcschooloutreach.org.