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RUHS Program Inspires Future Medical Leaders

Immersive experience helps middle school students explore healthcare careers

MORENO VALLEY, CA (May 16, 2024) – Time travel doesn't yet exist, but middle school students are peering into their futures as part of a collaborative program between Riverside University Health System - Medical Center (RUHS-MC) and Landmark Middle School in Moreno Valley that gives insight on what it's like to work in the medical field.

Each month, RUHS doctors bring medical science to life for more than 50 seventh and eighth graders in teacher Carly Blask's anatomy and physiology class through hands-on learning and experiments in epidemiology, the musculoskeletal system and more.

The program – Fostering Healthcare Education and Research Network – Middle School, or F(h)ERN-M, was created by pediatric residents Dr. Marcus Lowe and Dr. Jazmin Fernandez in September 2023. On a recent field trip to RUHS-MC, the students listened to inside stories from doctors in various fields, as well as a respiratory therapist and nursing coordinator before touring the morgue, a lab, Pediatrics and the Emergency Department.

"We want to give these middle schoolers a variety of opportunities to engage in healthcare," said RUHS Pediatric Primary Care Track Director Dr. Gabrielle Pina, who oversees the program. "We want them to know there are many potential roles in this field in addition to being doctors or nurses. Maybe they'll be a respiratory therapist, or maybe they're incredibly creative and can be a graphic artist, or even someone who helps fundraise to help keep the doors open."

Student Janelle Bailey, 14, said the tour not only helped her realize what she wouldn't want to do, but also what she liked. She felt a deep connection to a segment focused on babies.

"I started doing more research when I got home, and I realized I wanted to pursue a career in ultrasound," she said.

In the classroom, students have learned how to cast and splint broken bones, watched a doctor demonstrate a cardiac ultrasound and became certified in stopping a life-threatening bleeding injury.

"They showed us with different stations how we save someone's life by stopping a wound from bleeding, how to apply bandages and how to save someone when they're choking," said Sebastian Garcia, 14. "We've had a lot of time to put that to work, taking what we've learned and teaching it to other students as well as staff."

Blask said she's enjoyed seeing the light bulb moment that's visible on a student's face when they hear a doctor talk about an element of their job and the student realizes they could do the same thing.

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When speakers talk about themselves and how they got into the medical field, it only serves to inspire the students even more, she said.

[Inspiring our Future: Landmark Middle School Students' Journey with F\(h\)ERN-M and RUHS - YouTube](#)



“The medical field is a pretty high reaching goal,” Blask said. “It’s a difficult field to work in and to get into so having people come speak to them and tell them their stories and their backgrounds and how they got there, it shows them it is possible. It’s not just a dream. And it really gets them started on the right foot.”

Both Blask and Pina say they are excited to continue with the program and hope to expand the opportunity to other middle schools in the area.

For more information on Riverside University Health System, visit www.ruhealth.org.

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About Riverside University Health System The 439-bed Riverside University Health System (RUHS) Medical Center in Moreno Valley, Calif., is a teaching hospital and research hub with a Level I Trauma Center and the only Pediatric Intensive Care Unit in Riverside County. RUHS includes 14 Community Health Centers across Riverside County, the Public Health Department, and Behavioral Health, which provides emergency and inpatient psychiatric care. Visit RUHealth.org to learn more.