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Huntley High's first hospital residency graduates mark program's success



Twenty-four Huntley High School Medical Academy students are among the first batch of graduates of a hospital residency program at Centegra Hospital-Huntley. They are pictured with teacher Sheilagh DeLorenzo and Huntley Community School District 158 Superintendent John Burkey, right, and Centegra Health System Chief Executive Officer Michael Eesley, left.

Courtesy of Centegra Hospital-Huntley



Madhu Krishnamurthy

Serving a hands-on hospital residency during senior year in high school is not something many can brag about.

For Jack Bessey, 18, of Algonquin, it helped clinch a spot in a selective, nationally recognized biomedical engineering

program at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh.

"The first time I sat down with the (university) dean I brought up the residency," said Bessey, who was among the first group of 24 Huntley High School Medical Academy students to graduate from the unique program at Centegra Hospital-Huntley.

The reaction, Bessey said, was astonishment. The dean had never heard of a program that allowed high school students get this type of experience, he added.

Bessey said four years of participating in Huntley High's Medical Academy capped with the hospital residency helped him realize the many career choices in medicine. One of the moments during the residency that stuck with him was witnessing a woman give birth, he said.

"I was in the delivery room for two hours watching a baby being born. I was helping set up the baby's tubes," Bessey said. "You can't really get the experience of the residency program out of a book ... out of a video."

The 128-bed Centegra Hospital-Huntley and other clinical facilities served as learning sites. Students were able to do extensive job-shadowing of physicians and other health care professionals in more than 20 departments during their residencies.

Program graduates have a leg up on their peers in gaining real-world experiences that "can't be paralleled in the classroom," said Shelly Kish, Huntley High's associate principal overseeing the program.

"You just can't get that experience through any classroom no matter how hard you try," Kish said. "The program was a huge success this year. The kids really proved themselves and just handled themselves in a professional manner. Some (hospital) departments that weren't initially involved now want to get involved next year."

Graduates are pursuing various careers, including nursing, neuroscience, biomedical sciences and dietetics this fall at a four-year college or university, Kish said.

Twenty-eight students are enrolled in the residency program this fall. The class requires a minimum 3.5 grade-point average and three years of biomedical science for admission.

"It's our hope these students continue their education and they are going to come back to serve their family, friends and community," said Bernadette Szczepanski, senior vice president of human resources for Crystal Lake-based Centegra Health System. "We will track those students and how they have had an impact on our community."

Several local high schools have approached Centegra seeking to duplicate Huntley's program and some are going to pursue it, Szczepanski said.

Schools will be responsible for program development and might use Huntley as a model. In the future, students could be hosted at Huntley or another Centegra hospital, she added.

Centegra offers residencies for hundreds of college students in nursing and other clinical areas at its hospitals in McHenry and Woodstock, including a partnership with Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science in North Chicago.

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