

Archbishop Prendergast Student Reports from Summer Medical Camp

By Ginny Butchy

As a quick overview, the University of Pittsburgh Health Career Scholars Academy was a very comprehensive, five-week program. It included numerous lectures given by prestigious physicians and other medical professionals; tours and trips to medical facilities and "shadow days" that really immersed the students in hospital life.

I went out to make something of my time in Pittsburgh - I shadowed in NICU and stayed at an oral surgery long after all the other students (and some of the anesthesiologists) left. I got dinner at midnight, listened to horror stories about medical school told by a rambunctious group of residents, and went on countless ice cream runs.

I made many new friends from other high schools across Pennsylvania, and had more fun listening to case histories than seeing the latest Harry Potter movie. It was a fun summer, I learned a lot, and I know that I wouldn't have been half as excited or prepared to pursue a pre-medical education had I spent all my time recounting lectures on paper. I opted to get involved – a decision that convinced me that I want job in Health Care.

It's difficult to relive an entire month on paper, but I hope I can convey the deep gratitude and appreciation I have for being able to attend the program. I learned so much about medical careers, the health care industry, college life, and (even though it's a tad cliché) myself.

Classes started off fast and I had to hit the ground running. Checking out medical journals to complete the ten page research paper, completing detailed budget charts of the service project we were required to design, plan and run. Innumerable tasks were expected from us just to be considered participating. I watched as my fellow bright-eyed, bushy-tailed pupils drooped with the side effects of too much coffee and too little sleep. The work was taxing – but nothing stopped us from eagerly awaiting every exciting day we spent at the hospital.

One day we sutured pig's feet and it was surprisingly difficult! We stood on the plastic tarps laid down in a hospital conference room - we had specifically been instructed not to rip up said plastic - and clustered around the long table clothed tables while stretching our latex gloves over our sticky hands. Dr. Lynn, the surgeon instructing us, gave us some very in depth instructions about a very simple knot. I remember scoffing, I had long mastered my shoelaces; how much of a challenge could a three-to-four step knot with the jumbo practice strings possibly pose me, the honors student. Then they handed out the forceps.

After three minutes of desperate floundering and only accomplishing picking up the two ends of the lace, I was considerably less arrogant. Thankfully I was across the table from a boy scout, so he drug me and everyone else at the table who hadn't gone to weekend camps-for-square-knots though it. When we moved on to the actual pig feet – equipped with large lacerations that we were supposed to suture – I was unhappy to see how thick the skin was and how thin the string was. It was nearly impossible to get the needle through the skin and then the other side and tie it, but with the careful hand of a boy scout and the teamwork of four of others our pig began to mend. We even dared to say that we had the best one in the class; it was definitely a close second at worst.

Suturing was really difficult, it's scary to think about doing that in a wound on a human, worst case scenario on a squirming child that needs stitches. I quite obviously needed more practice.

As camp continued I often reconsidered my original plans to go to medical school, as the suturing exemplified – medical school was going to pose a whole new set of challenges and lessons. I wasn't going to be able to get by

with just my brain – like I can in some of my high school classes. I was going to have to study hard and long to accomplish my goal – medicine wasn't inherent.

Some days we would play games to team build, or learn something – in order to break the monotony of classroom lectures. One game I participated in was called blood money, it was supposed to teach us the trials of life as a handicapped individual, specifically a hemophiliac.

Players had to simultaneously worry about spontaneous attacks of bleeding, and money, and jobs. It was very confusing – but conferred the real point which was that the health care system is a very confusing and most times unfair game. I played for about twenty of the sixty minutes in the game. I spent the last forty in the graveyard after dying because I couldn't afford "medication".

Probably my favorite memory from UPHCSA was when we went on a site visit to the Western Psychiatry Facilities. When we had started the program in Pittsburgh we were asked to choose a concentration course. We were given several options but the one that really interested me was psychiatry. My trip to Western Psych gave me a lot of hope for patients in my own family who suffer from similar problems. This experience also destroyed a previous impression I had about patients with mental illness, and the success of treatments.

When the last day of the program came, I will be the first to admit, I was ready to go home. But it was a good thing, I had worked very hard, and learned a lot. Now, I was ready to go home and share my knowledge with others. It was hard to leave all the friends and mentors behind in Pittsburgh, but it was a good feeling to be coming home to the ones I have here – in Delaware County. Not to mention I was getting really sick of the fact that there Seven-Elevens in Pittsburgh don't have Tasty-cakes.

Once again, thanks to everyone that was involved in allowing me to attend this program, it was life-changing and only served to strengthen my dream to go into the medical profession.