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Campers get a peek inside the world of medicine

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Addressing disparities in Florida's physician workforce requires starting early — long before the start of the medical-school admissions process.

The Florida State University College of Medicine, through its outreach programs, seeks first to tilt the odds in favor of finding more qualified medical students from underrepresented backgrounds. Studies show that such students, once they become physicians, are more likely to care for populations faced with the biggest doctor shortages.

The newest part of that effort is a summer "mini-med school" experience for high-school students.

The College of Medicine Summer Institute is a weeklong event for rising high-school juniors and seniors, providing an inside look at what it means to be both a doctor and a medical student. But more than that, it's another way to encourage students from diverse backgrounds to imagine themselves in the role of physician.

The first week of the Summer Institute, held June 13-20, brought in 15 participants, all of whom will enter 11th or 12th grade this fall. The students hail from Gadsden, Volusia, Madison, Orange and Leon counties. The second week, which ended Friday, included 17 participants.

Typically, children from medically underserved communities or backgrounds never get the encouragement to consider a career in medicine.

To introduce such an idea at an early age, the College of Medicine works with middle- and high-schoolers through SSTRIDE (Science Students Together Reaching Instructional Diversity and Excellence). It's an ongoing program aimed at inspiring an interest in the medical sciences among students who might otherwise never consider a future as a scientist or physician.

"Our goal for the Summer Institute is to recruit students from rural, underserved and minority backgrounds and, at the same time, recruit students from other parts of Florida who have a desire to work in medically underserved areas," said Thesla Berne-Anderson, director of college and pre-college outreach at the College of Medicine.

"The philosophy of the Summer Institute is similar to how the College of Medicine's admissions process works. Also, it helps in our effort to recruit students for our Medical Honors Scholars program, along with helping identify high-school students who might join our SSTRIDE program."

The focus on minority recruitment stems from the college's founding mission to help train doctors for Florida's traditionally underserved populations. A 2007 study indicated that fewer than 5 percent of Florida's practicing physicians are black and 15 percent are Hispanic.

The students had the opportunity to shadow physicians and College of Medicine students, visit rural health centers and get college testing and application advice. In one activity, they trained in the Charlotte Edwards Maguire Medical Library and Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare Center for Clinical Simulation. They could examine high-tech "manikins" programmed to display certain vital signs such as pulse, lung activity and blood pressure.

Participants Ysabel Ilagan of Orlando, Imanuel Gayle of Tallahassee and Persis Mistry of Daytona Beach inspected one manikin with guidance from second-year medical student Carolina Pereira.

"Blood pressure is definitely the trickiest [vital sign] to figure out," said Ilagan as she completed a reading.
