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Martin students get taste of medicine at FSU's Summer Institute

By Adriana Montoya

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MARTIN COUNTY -- Rachael Candela, a 17-year-old Jensen Beach High School senior, knew she wanted to pursue a career in health care, but couldn't decide which one was right for her.

It wasn't until she got a firsthand glimpse of the Florida State University medical school that she realized her passion is to become a physician.

The Summer Institute program, which began in 2003 as part of an outreach effort to recruit minorities into the FSU College of Medicine, offers high-school-aged students of diverse backgrounds an opportunity to experience what it's like to be both a doctor and medical student.

Emily Larsen and Candela from Jensen Beach High School, and Maryna Wakeman and Kara Russel from the Clark Advanced Learning Center in Stuart are the four Treasure Coast participants this summer. A total of 62 students enrolled in the program from across the state.

"This program is a great way to provide a career pathway for students that have been traditionally underrepresented in the medical, health and scientific fields," said Thesla Berne-Anderson, director of college and pre-college outreach at the College of Medicine. "Our goal is to bring students from these medically under-served communities to our medical school and, in turn, hope they will focus on becoming physicians that will go back and work in those communities."

The summer program is divided into three intensive weeklong sessions, each day designated to one of five program themes: Geriatrics, primary care, rural medicine, college and medical school, and medical research.

From 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., students participate in educational activities, which include shadowing physicians, attending workshops and college preparation classes, practicing CPR and other medical techniques in school's simulation labs, and conducting medical research on obesity and DNA.

"I didn't expect to be doing and seeing so much during the program," said Candela, who was sponsored by the FSU College of Medicine Regional Campus in Fort Pierce.

"We even got to see cadavers, which I didn't expect, and one of the friends I made there got to see an open-heart surgery."

The program costs \$875, which includes meals and housing for the week, but economically disadvantaged students can participate on scholarship, said Berne-Anderson.

Participants must have a minimum 3.3 GPA, a letter of recommendation and demonstrate leadership skills in their application essay.

"The selection process is competitive," said Elizabeth Foster, the college's assistant director of research and graduate programs, in a news release. "We sought the best and brightest at their schools. They should feel proud about being selected."

Russel of Palm City is one of the lucky few chosen by the directors. She is being sponsored by the Robert F. and Eleonora W. McCabe Foundation to participate in the program's third session.

"The medical school is beautiful, with excellent advising and an encouraging, friendly atmosphere," said Russel, 17. "Unlike highly competitive med schools, you can tell that the students here genuinely befriend each other."

The program has proved to be a success in attracting students to FSU and its medical school. About 25 students chose to attend the university and four students are part of its medical school as a result of their Summer Institute experience, said Berne-Anderson.

"(The program) made me want to help people who can't afford help," said Russel. "It seems like it's a lot of hard work but really rewarding."



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