

Mentoring the Next Generation of Physicians

Not all children have the same chance of becoming a physician in the United States. Children who grow up in lower-income families or have parents who aren't college graduates may face an uphill battle if they hope to join the ranks of tomorrow's doctors.

The Hippocrates Circle program at Kaiser Permanente in Panorama City aims to level the playing field a bit by giving some of these local kids a head start in their pursuit of a medical degree.

Forty-six students from Maclay Middle School in Pacoima, the latest group to complete the program, were honored in a ceremony at the school on May 18.

"This is the sixth year of our program," says Panorama City Health Educator Lisa Cano, RN. "In addition to giving these kids a behind-the-scenes look at the medical profession," she says, "we're hoping to inspire them to pursue their dreams and impact the huge shortage of physicians that experts have predicted will occur in the next decade and beyond."

As part of the Hippocrates Circle program, the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students from Maclay Middle School met with a diverse group of physicians from Kaiser Permanente in Panorama City and heard first-hand the challenges of achieving success

given their cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. A representative of the Health Education Department in Panorama City also gave a bilingual presentation to the students and their parents about the application process for loans, grants, and scholarships.

On May 5, the students traveled to the UC Irvine School of Medicine for a tour led by Panorama City Family Medicine physician Juan Vargas, MD, mentor for the Hippocrates Circle and a graduate of the UC Irvine School of Medicine.

"I see myself when I look in the faces of these kids," Dr. Vargas says. "Words really can't express the personal joy and professional satisfaction I get from being able to help nurture their goals for a career in medicine."

On May 7, the students toured the Panorama City Medical Center. During the tour, they learned about operating room procedures from an anesthesiologist, visited the laboratory and gained insights from a pathologist, saw the Emergency Department and heard from a physician specializing in Emergency Medicine, and completed their tour by meeting with Pharmacists in our Hospital Pharmacy.

At the graduation ceremony on May 18, the students also received a certificate from the office of Assemblyman Felipe Fuentes, commending their achievements.



Juan Vargas, MD, speaks to the graduating class of the 2011 Hippocrates Circle Program and their families.