

DOCTORS ACADEMY

Selma teens learn about medicine in Doctors Academy



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Juana Juarez's goal of becoming a doctor requires her to consider her future in the long term. For example, the now 17-year-old will be 30 by the time she completes medical school and hospital residency. "That's quite a long time," Juana says. "My mom says, 'That's true. But won't it be worth it?'" Juana is one of three Selma High students that includes Danayara Diaz, 18, and Teresa Lopez, 16, who have been accepted into the Doctors Academy program. The students have the opportunity see what the life of a physician

is really like.

The academy, which began in 2007 at Selma High, is sponsored by the University of California, San Francisco, and its Fresno Latino Center for Medical Education and Research. In addition, the UCSF Fresno Pharmacy Education Program offers pharmacy job shadowing opportunities.

The Doctors Academy provides extended academic, personal and career counseling as well as test preparation. Successful students can earn scholarships and consideration for early admission to UCSF schools of medicine, pharmacy and dentistry.

Kaiser Permanente pediatricians, Dr. Lorraine Lopez and Dr. Aimee Simbre, are mentoring the Selma students.

"Kaiser Permanente Fresno has been a financial supporter of the Doctors Academy program since 1999," Kerri Leedy, Kaiser media relations specialist says. "We have been offering job-shadowing opportunities for students in the program since 2003. This summer, we have four students job-shadowing our physicians — three in Selma and one at the Fresno medical center."

The Kaiser Permanente Selma Medical Offices are located on Highland Avenue.

During the last school year, 2011-2012, Kaiser Permanente Fresno gave a \$35,000 grant to help support the program and increase the students' preparedness to enter and succeed in college, Leedy said.

Dr. Lopez has been practicing medicine for 12 years with nine years at the Selma medical offices. Her own path to medicine was arduous. She raised a family during medical school and a residency.

"It was so hard to get through it," she says. "I made a lot of promises to God and one was to help other students out. I wanted to be a good mentor. Not someone on a power trip that was going to make them feel bad."

Working alongside the doctors allows students see how doctors interact with patients.

It's an advantage Dr. Simbre considers key in preparing tomorrow's doctors.

"The students are already learning how to interact with patients," Simbre says. "It's an experience not found in a text book."

Gaining the trust of a patient takes special care. Simbre often provides patients her personal phone number.

"I try to be personal as I can," Simbre says. "I want the family to think of me as their primary care provider."

Juana says Doctors Academy helps her understand the variety of ailments seen at the pediatrician's office. It's everything from hernias to ear infections to lacerations.

"I've seen a lot of skin problems and asthma," she says.

Juana's interest in medicine came after witnessing her sister's weeks-long spine treatment. She was also influenced by a documentary titled, "Operation Smile."

"I'm lucky Kaiser has this program for high school students," Juana says. "My parents are really proud. They didn't get to go to high school or college."

Danayara has been in the program since freshman year.

"I was so happy to get accepted into the program," she says. "My parents support me being in the program."

Teresa Lopez was considering a career as a pathologist. However, through Doctors Academy, she's now interested in family medicine.

How do Teresa and the other students deal with witnessing invasive procedures? Blood, for example?

"I'm perfectly OK with it," Teresa says.

The teen has also discovered that some patients don't always follow doctor's orders.

"They don't always follow through and take their medication," she says. "Some don't want to listen to their doctor's advice and there is nothing you can do about it."