By MARIA G. ORTIZ-BRIONES
Vida en el Valle
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FRESNO — For high school senior Sergio Hernández, waking up at 6 a.m. to make sure he doesn’t miss the two buses that would take him from his house in southeast Fresno to Kaiser Permanente hospital in north Fresno is worth the sacrifice in order to learn from a health professional this summer.

"Sergio, he comes to us on the bus. It shows the kind of determination of someone who wants to learn," said Dr. Sidney E. Carpenter, a pathologist with Kaiser Permanente and this year’s mentor to the 17-year-old student. "We do a lot of stuff in the lab."

Hernández is one of the 56 students from Sunnyside, Selma and Caruthers high schools in the UCSF Fresno Doctors Academy 2014 Senior Summer Clinical Internship and Research program.

During the five-week program students will learn from many healthcare professionals from nurses to ophthalmologist, pediatrician, to dermatologist, to pathologist to other physicians throughout the Fresno area including Kaiser Permanente, Central Valley Children’s Hospital, Community Regional Medical Center, Reedley Hospital and private practice among others.

"All 56 students, which are completing a secondary research project, have been granted an opportunity to shadow a health professional of one of their top three areas of interest," said Diana Cantú, Doctors Academy academic program coordinator at the three high schools.

Students will spend three days a week, six-hours a day with the health professional observing medical procedures as well as interacting with patients during medical appointment while two days a week they work on their research project. Students started the five-week program on June 23.

"Through observation and interaction with health professionals and patients, DA students can better understand the significance a culturally and linguistically competent health professional brings to the community," said Dr. Katherine A. Flores, director of UCSF Latino Center for Medical Education and Research.

Thanks to the program "our DA seniors have the opportunity to affirm their interest in a health career," said Flores.

According to Kerri Leedy, Media Relations Specialist at Kaiser Permanente Fresno, 10 students from the Doctors Academy program are doing their internship this summer at Kaiser.

As Hernández’ mentor, Carpenter said he want to provide him with a "full experience of everyday aspect of the lab."

Carpenter has been a mentor for Doctors Academy students for many years.

"It opens up their minds to different possibilities, not just what is popular," Carpenter said of why he keeps volunteering to be a mentor.

Carpenter said the program also allows students to develop relationships with health care professionals that can last longer than the program.
"I learn from students as well. I try to teach them and they have a different perspective. It's a 50/50 learning experience," Carpenter said.

Cantú said this group of students is very motivated to learn and be part of the program.

"These students are willing to sacrifice their summer time to see health professionals," Cantú said.

Hernández said he is dedicated to the program and won't let transportation become an obstacle in being part of the internship program.

Like Hernández, Elizabeth Gutierrez is another student from Sunnyside High School taking part of the Doctors Academy summer internship program at Kaiser.

Gutierrez, 16, is doing her internship at the ophthalmology department at Kaiser and her research project on how diabetes affects the eyes. Gutierrez said she picked the topic because many people in her family suffer from diabetes.

During the first few days of the internship program, Gutierrez has received hands on training including doing slit lamp exams, which allows her to see different parts of the patient's eye.

"Students can visualize themselves in that role and increase their motivation to continue the pathway to health professional school," Flores said. "This experience also allows DA students to reflect if indeed it is medicine they wish to pursue.

"The pathway to health professional school is an ardent one, if students can begin it with a reality of what awaits them and with passion to pursue it, then it will make the outcome of the journey that much more rewarding."

Send e-mail to:
morlizbriones@vidaenalvalle.com