Doctors Academy readies students for medical career

Dr. Joaquin Arambula reviews Milagro Buenrostro's research project before seeing patients at Adventist Health Selma campus' emergency room July 23

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Milagro Buenrostro may never wear a cape to work, but she'll likely feel like a superhero when she dons scrubs someday.

As a UCSF Fresno Doctors Academy student at Selma High, Milagro spent the past five weeks learning the ropes from Dr. Joaquin Arambula at the Adventist Health Selma campus.

The experience has left her eager to help those who are hurting, like the superheroes in her favorite DC and Marvel Comics.

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"I've always wanted to do something involving trauma. It keeps me on my toes," Milagro said. She's one of a classroom of incoming seniors enrolled in the four-year program that's also taking place in Reedley, Caruthers and Fresno high schools.

The UCSF Fresno Latino Center for Medical Education and Research partnered with Fresno Unified School District and Fresno County Office of Education in 1999 to start the initial program at
Sunnyside High. The goal is to encourage educationally disadvantaged students to focus on careers in health and medicine. A junior program started in 2000 to target middle school students. In 2007, Doctors Academy programs were established at Caruthers and Selma high schools. A total of 97 students are enrolled at Caruthers High School and 90 are enrolled at Selma High School.

With only one shift left and an end-of-the-summer presentation left, Milagro realizes she’d rather pursue nursing first, and then possibly become a doctor.

"During this whole experience, I changed my mind a lot," Milagro said. "I really liked the way the nurses worked. They were always doing something in the patient’s care."

She was first inspired to consider a medical career when she was younger and followed her mother as she worked in hospice care.

"You get close to the patients," she said of those earlier memories.

Dr. Arambula has his own memories of when he was the student enrolled in a medical career mentoring program. Born to farmworking parents in Delano, Arambula attended Fresno’s Edison Comptech school. Now as a doctor, he enjoys guiding students in their exuberance as they seek their own medical career path.

"I like seeing the drive they have," Arambula said explaining how students in the program follow him on all his rounds and experience a realistic day in the life of a doctor.

"They see the same patients I do," he said. The ER waiting room that night had a steady stream of patients ranging in age from parents with small children to the elderly. Previous patients during the mentoring were experiencing abdominal pain, chest pain, lacerations, dislocations... and lots of ambulance arrivals.

"Normally, the only doctors they ever get to see are us. It’s nice to represent medicine to them and give care they wouldn’t see otherwise," Arambula said.

Far from panicking when she hears the sirens, Milagro said her mindset is to get prepared to see what treatment is needed.

"A new patient’s arrived," she said.

"And it’s time to go to work," Arambula added.

Since the goal of the program is to have students return to the San Joaquin Valley to practice medicine, Milagro has set a goal studying in Fresno and returning to Selma.

"Selma needs my help."

But she won’t be wearing any capes. Those can get caught and wind up being dangerous. she said. Maybe a jumpsuit?

Arambula has a better idea.

"Scrubs."

The summer mentoring concluded with nearly 60 students presenting their research findings at the UCSF Fresno Center for Medical Education and Research July 24.

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