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Bridging the Gaps program trains students

WILMINGTON, DE (August 20, 2003) Broadening the training of students in the health professions through service to underserved communities is the objective of the Bridging the Gaps Community Health Internship Program. Operated in Pennsylvania by medical schools and allied health institutions since 1991, the program was initiated at Christiana Care this summer. Janice E. Nevin, M.D., MPH, chair of Christiana Care's department of Family and Community Medicine, and Rob Simmons, Dr. PH, MPH, CHES, manager, Community and Government Relations in External Affairs, are leading the effort.

Real-world experience

Nevin sees significant benefits for the students working together. "I believe that students in the health professions, particularly medical students, need real-world experience in community health and the perspective that comes from working on an interdisciplinary team. The program provides the opportunity to make a tremendous impact on the students as future health care providers," says Nevin. Students work full-time for seven weeks during the summer and receive a \$2,500 stipend. For some students, the stipend is simply a bonus as the real value is the experiential education they receive. "I get paid for it, but feel sometimes that I should be the one paying because I am getting such a good education," notes Laurie Abildso, program participant who is a graduate student in Health Promotion at the University of Delaware.

Influence thousands

Tara Raviprakash, program participant and second-year medical student at the University of Maryland, also sees the benefits of the program. "As a doctor, you influence one patient every 10 to 15 minutes. When you are in a public health setting, you are influencing thousands of people with every decision you make. I wanted to get a feel for how it is to be in a position to influence more than one person every 10 to 15 minutes," comments Raviprakash. Four students, along with Christiana Care's Visiting Nurse Association (VNA) and Westside Health, are participating in the program. At VNA, students are working with practicing nurses to develop health education prescriptions for home-bound patients. At Westside, students are developing an oral education outreach program for the community.

Preceptors

Students benefit from the guidance of a community preceptor at VNA and Westside Health – Gale Bucher, RN, and Maryann Bailey, DDS, respectively. In future years, Nevin and Simmons hope to expand the program and involve students from more of the health professions, including nursing, dental hygiene, social work and nutrition. "It is phenomenal to have the chance to make academic/community links – marrying the mission of Christiana Care and the work of community agencies, says Nevin. Funding for this year's group has been provided by Christiana Care's Medical-Dental Staff and Department of Family and Community Medicine, the Delaware Health Care Commission and the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine.

Christiana Care Health System, which traces its roots back to 1888, is one of the region's largest not-for profit health care providers, serving the people of Delaware as well as neighboring Maryland, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. A teaching hospital, Christiana Care is recognized as a regional center for excellence in cardiology, cancer and women's health services, as well as Level-I trauma care and Level-3 neonatal intensive care (both highest intensity). Christiana Care operates two hospitals, long-term and transitional care services and an extensive range of outpatient and home health services. Last year, Christiana Care provided \$42.8 million of charity care.