

## **Practicing Physicians Can Influence Career Choice in Medicine**

### **To the Editor:**

Early exposure to medical experiences can influence students' decisions to go into medicine. Since our medical school is a 6-year combined BS-MD program that admits students after graduation from high school, we established a program titled, "A Day in the Life of. . ." to provide high school students with 1-day opportunities to be exposed to various medical activities. This program was implemented from 1992–1995. We targeted high schools in three counties in which most of our community-based medical education takes place at the third- and fourth-year levels. We used six family practice centers affiliated with our medical school, Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine (NEOUCOM). The options that could be selected by the site physician coordinators for student activities included 1) Observe and talk with second-year medical students as they engage in family practice center-based educational experiences in the sophomore-level Introduction to Clinical Medicine course. 2) Perform exam techniques with faculty supervision. 3) Observe and talk with junior medical students as they engaged in family practice center-based required family practice experiences. 4) Observe family physicians as they provide patient care. The flexibility of scheduling made it possible for the various family practice centers to provide experiences without spending much faculty or medical student time. At the conclusion of each student's scheduled activities, students were queried to elicit feedback about their experiences. In addition, at the end of each year, all guidance/career counselors and family medicine faculty coordinators were surveyed to provide feedback. An end-of-year dinner program was held to acknowledge the students' participation in the program. Guidance counselors, parents, and center staff were also invited. Over the 3 years, a total of 216 students participated in the "A Day in the Life of. . ." program from 32 schools in three counties. Sixty seven percent were female; 79% were white, 14% Black, and 7% "other." Sophomores and juniors comprised more than 90% of the sample. The overall student response to our program was overwhelmingly positive. Faculty coordinators' and guidance counselors' evaluations of the program were also positive, although school counselors did not seem knowledgeable about careers in medicine. Before the program started, 28% of the students were not aware that family practice was a medical specialty. A total of 78% of the participants indicated an increased awareness and interest in NEOUCOM. Students' level of interest in both medicine and family practice significantly increased as a result of the program. The most highly rated influences toward an interest in medicine were physicians, parents, and family, in that order. Students who had an interest in a primary care specialty before the program began were more likely to have discussed medicine with their personal physician, and students who chose primary care were more likely to have spoken to their physician about family practice. These findings indicate that practicing physicians can be effective in stimulating interest in primary care careers.

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