

Health Careers Academy to be used as national model 4yearold Berrien program for high school students wins state excellence award

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RIGHT - DANIEL KUNDE, a senior at Bridgman High School, works a rotation in the emergency room at Lakeland Hospital in St. Joseph. Kunde wants to become a registered nurse.



ST. JOSEPH — Concerned about a serious shortage of qualified health care workers, local hospital officials and area educators decided four years ago to see if they could grow their own. The result, the Professional Health Careers Academy, has won the state's Office of Career and Technical Preparations 2006

Excellence in Practice Award and will be used as a national pilot for similar programs across the country. The Excellence in Practice Award goes every year to programs that exemplify the highest standards in preparing Michigan's students for higher education and careers, Lakeland spokeswoman Danielle Trapp said. The PHCA is a partnership between Lakeland Regional Health System, the Berrien County Intermediate School District, Lake Michigan College and Western Michigan University. Students from all over Berrien County attend classes at Lakeland and LMC, earning college credits while getting hands-on experience in a hospital setting. Students, teachers and hospital officials celebrated their success at a lunch recently at the Fireside Inn/Park Inn conference center in Stevensville. Paul Bergan, regional director of career technical education for the Berrien County ISD, said Lakeland approached educators four years ago about working with the hospital to train future health care workers. "Within 60 days we had a plan," Bergan said. "It was the most phenomenal plan I'd ever been involved in."

Lakeland's idea fit well with the efforts of Berrien County school districts to set children on career paths in high school, Bergan said. The health industry is the biggest employer in Berrien County, and the Professional Health Careers Academy offers students a chance to return to their home towns for a job after college. Joseph Wasserman, Lakeland's president and CEO, said the essence of the academy is training tomorrow's health care workers. He said it ensures that this region will have enough health care professionals in the future. Jerry Guinane, Lakeland's vice president of human resources and organization development, said he hopes the local students will discover there is a wide variety of health care career choices available to them in Berrien County.

Flushing IVs, changing dressings Mallorie Kettlehut of Sodus, a senior at Eau Claire High School, knows she wants to be a nurse. "This will help me confirm my career pathway. I don't have a specialty picked out yet, but I like the hospital setting. I also did a hospice rotation, and I liked geriatrics, which is a growing need," she said. "I think choosing a career pathway in high school is good, because college is so expensive." Registered nurse Heidi Gruntman, Mallorie's mentor, even comes to work on her days off to be with Mallorie on her rotation in the Cardiac Telemetry Unit at Lakeland. Gruntman wants someday to teach nursing. "We need more people involved in the health care field. The shortage is serious, and it will be worse in 2010. This gives students a hands-on grip," Gruntman said of the academy. The CTU involves heart monitoring.

Mallorie said she has learned about flushing IVs, positioning patients and changing wound dressings. Scott Morris, career and technical education teacher for the Benton Harbor Area Schools district, has been the classroom teacher for the PHCA since it began and is excited about its success. "One guy the first year just knew he wanted to have a family practice. His first rotation was dentistry. Now he's entering the accelerated dentistry program at Indiana University," Morris said. The most popular rotations this year have been the CTU and Enterostoma, which is ostomy wound care, he said. Morris said his class of 24 this year consists of 16 girls and eight boys. The other 23 PHCA students take their classes at Lakeland Hospital, Niles. On his rotation in the hospital's emergency room, Daniel Kunde said he has seen everything from serious injuries to heart attack and stroke.

A senior at Bridgman High School, Daniel said he wants to become a registered nurse and will consider Lakeland as a job option. "I grew up here. I like the area. Coming back here is definitely an option," he said. "I like working with the patients and hearing their stories. They open up to you." Daniel said he and his friends in the academy have recommended it to younger students at Bridgman who are looking for a career pathway. How to get in To enter the academy, which is open to juniors and seniors, students must have a 3.0 or better grade point average, pass biology with a B or better, have several recommendations from teachers, school counselors and administrators, and complete an application and interview process with staff from Lakeland, Lake Michigan College and Niles Community Schools or Benton Harbor Area Schools. There are 47 students from all over Berrien County in the program, which is run by the Niles and Benton Harbor school districts. Students complete the program with up to 13.5 college credits. Students spend either their morning or afternoon in the academy, beginning with seven weeks of classroom instruction followed by seven supervised three week rotations in health care settings. During the hands-on rotations with a health care mentor, the students learn what it takes to be a physician, surgeon, nurse, anesthesiologist, optometrist, veterinarian, dentist or other health care professional. "This is a tremendous long-term commitment on the part of Lakeland," the ISD's Bergan said. "This award validates all the things we're doing. It shows we're on the right track. We want people to know you can get a good paying job right here. There's a tremendous need in all phases of health care, and we have a responsibility to help make kids aware of that."

Jeff Siegel, Berrien County ISD superintendent, called the award "a big honor." "The PHCA partners, instructors and students have demonstrated their commitment to the future of health care in our community," he said.

Signups for next year Lakeland spends \$45,000 a year on the academy, paying for uniforms, textbooks and college credits for the students. The Benton Harbor and Niles school districts commit \$80,000 each, mostly for teacher salaries. The other districts reimburse Niles and Benton Harbor for their students, who do not pay to attend the academy. The only cost to students is about \$80 to \$100 in college credit transfer fees, Bergan said. Bergan said the academy is taking applications now for next year. Students should apply at their home school district by Feb. 23. Those who are accepted will be notified by March 1, and meetings with parents will be held in April.