

Hospital CEO views student interns as a 'farm system of future talent'

BY MINDY RUBENSTEIN

"Community Connections" highlights the many ways in which hospitals serve their communities and how state hospital associations help them reaffirm their place as vital community resources. AHA members can learn more by clicking on the "Community Connections" icon at www.aha.org.

Located in one of the poorest areas of Maine, Down East Community Hospital recently stepped up its outreach efforts with an innovative high school internship program. Wayne Dodwell, Down East Community Hospital president and CEO, started the program last year with Washington Academy High School in Machias, an area known primarily for lobster fishing.



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The rural, 25-bed hospital donated \$30,000 to renovate the school's aging science lab facilities. Dodwell wanted to do more, so he approached the high school principal with his idea. "We decided to take it a step further through a collaborative program," Dodwell said, recalling his internship days in college.

The high school juniors and seniors earn one academic credit of honors-level coursework that appears on their report card, as well as hands-on experience working directly with nurses, laboratory technicians, and other hospital employees. While last year's program was held after school and drew eight participants, the ongoing program will be considered an elective and held during school hours.

"The class size should really pick up," Dodwell said. The hospital's director of clinical services runs the program and works closely with school administrators.



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then assist with lab tests at the hospital.

"It gets the kids more interested in the coursework they're studying because they can apply it immediately in the lab," Dodwell said.

School principal Judson McBride said the school "really didn't have any students looking at the medical field" before the partnership. But "every student that participated is now considering going into health care." The internship program also could limit the area's "brain drain" that occurs when students leave for college and don't return. "They can come back to Washington County and work at the hospital," McBride said. "If someone has a connection to this area there's more chance that they'll stay."

The 220-employee hospital, like many rural hospitals, has trouble filling jobs, and the internship program creates what CEO Dodwell dubs a "farm system of future talent."

The hospital's outreach efforts also have included donating old microscopes and other equipment to schools, developing a greenhouse in a high school, and subsidizing middle school summer camps and childcare centers to help working parents.

But community outreach hasn't always come easy. When Dodwell started as CEO in 2002, the hospital had no resources to invest in the community. He helped the facility stabilize financially and clinically, and then turned to community outreach.

The internship program takes these efforts to the next level, he said. "Together we can do more for the community than we can separately."



FOCUS ON CARE. Students participate in a clinical internship program at Down East Community Hospital as part of their high school academic curriculum.

Hospital and school administrators hope the program will spur students' interest in the medical field, and persuade them to return to Machias after college. Students in the program will learn chemistry in class, and