

Overview

Located in Atlanta, Grady Memorial Hospital is the fifth largest public hospital in the US. It serves a six-county area, primarily focusing on serving the underserved and uninsured population in Georgia. Grady is a 953-bed health system with 7,251 staff members. Recognizing a large demographic gap between their employee and patient populations, Grady's leadership learned that the staff was interested in bridging that gap and in getting more local students engaged in health care careers.

Development and Progression of the Teen Experience and Leadership Program

Before the pandemic, Grady Health System already had a small teen volunteer program in which students gained exposure to careers in health care. When Senior Vice President and Inaugural Chief Health Equity Officer Yolanda Wimberly, M.D., joined Grady Health System, she recognized the keen inquisitiveness of the teenagers whom she cared for as a pediatrician and adolescent medicine physician. Impassioned by the curiosity rising from these teens and her deep commitment to education, Wimberly used her position at Grady to create the Teen Experience and Leadership Program (TELP).

Basing the development of the new initiative on an existing program allowed the TELP team to hit the ground running. Dr. Wimberly's vision rapidly expanded the scope of the program to engage teen volunteers in clinical and non-clinical roles. With the blessing of Grady's CEO, Wimberly first met with unit staff to learn about their work and to introduce them to her vision for the program. Grady has over 200 staff volunteers, so the program requires support from members and departments across the organization. Even from the beginning, the majority of units were enthused and wanted to participate.



The experience of months of careful planning provided a grounding in practicality. Wimberly was determined to ensure that contingencies were in place to forestall workforce shortages and avoid other challenges to staff participation that could deplete resources and weaken commitment. It is clear now and substantiated that TELP leadership will support participating units if issues arise. With knowledge of that assurance, the units are committed to providing an exceptional experience for the teens to learn what health care careers entail.

TELP's Initial Successes

Grady began advertising the program with virtual meet and greets for high school students and their parents. TELP's pilot in 2022 saw 35 students participate, growing to 236 in 2023 from a pool of 400 applicants.

The program involves 42 hospital units available for rotation, including clinical and nonclinical units, such as human resources, finance and legal compliance, among others. Grady wanted to ensure that all students, regardless of their schedules, would be able to engage in the experience. TELP offers considerable flexibility in time commitment, with the minimum being eight hours every two weeks. Students choose from several shifts held seven days each week in order to accommodate students' busy schedules with school, work, sports and other commitments.

With the autonomy to structure their own experience, students select the number of shifts they attend and choose the units they want to experience from the wide variety offered. One student participated in 27 different units; other participants chose to attend the same unit every day.

The large number of units participating ensures that the workload can be well distributed throughout the hospital, as well. The employees are excited to mentor the teens; that excitement is the fuel that propels TELP staff to continue innovating.

Results

The greatest success of the TELP is the exposure of participants to actual health care workers and the hands-on career experience gained.

Staff did not anticipate the wide variety of teens who would participate in this program; students came from 116 different schools, with 82% from public schools. About 95% of participants have never set foot on the Grady campus before, and approximately 60% of them have never been in the vicinity of downtown Atlanta.

Participants are spread across rotations, so in addition to exposure to the different departments, they are meeting peers from different parts of the Atlanta area. Staff report anecdotal evidence of budding friendships among participants and of stories about building those relationships through their experience on the units.

Grady has also benefited from hosting TELP: the institution has been opened more significantly to the community. As the teens move through clinical and nonclinical rotations, they meet employees from across the hospital system. Past participants have shared stories about Grady staff acting as mentors,

giving them advice about life, school and career, and fostering positive experiences about careers in health care.

As part of the experience, staff conduct exit interviews with all participants. Although they hope for positive responses about the experience, they are continually surprised by how meaningful the experience is to the teens. It is clear that the participants are taking their stories home, sharing with their families and friends about their experiences they have with the community that Grady serves, and about how they can give back to the community through their time at Grady.

TELP staff was not prepared for how closely the students reflect their surroundings. Many participants

shared their understanding of and willingness to embrace patient histories and their understanding of the importance of clear and empathetic communication. Teens bring their excitement to morning huddle, eager to best support patient care. They gain a sense of belonging within the team of care providers, of being a part of something larger than themselves; they learn how to give grace; they learn to process difficult situations, such as when a patient has an undesired outcome. Even

students who are not inclined to clinical experiences are provided opportunities to explore and experience the various careers in health care which they might never have known. Many participants describe leaving the program a different person.

Lessons Learned

The surprising growth in the first year of the program was one of the biggest challenges for Grady. Despite a small marketing campaign in 2023, Grady received 433 applications and had to dismiss hundreds of potential participants. Nonetheless, even with the

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limited placements, the task of tracking the number of teenagers and assignments is significant. Soon after the first year began, Grady staff realized that they needed a dedicated liaison for each unit to coordinate the student experiences on a daily basis.

Many participants express interest in returning to TELP the next summer, which prompts the team to identify and develop ways to accommodate even more participants. The TELP team's diligent measurement of the program's progress is focused on tracking participants who pursue health care careers. The database of past TELP participants serves as a conduit to greater enrollment as the TELP staff continue to identify training and career opportunities that excite and shape the next generation of health professionals.

Next Steps

Grady wants to ensure that TELP can offer students a variety of meaningful experiences, but also that they can offer it to as many people in the community as possible. On average throughout the summer, Grady sees 70 students rotating through each day.

TELP teens bring countless ideas about how the program can offer even more access, such as expand the program to fall and winter break and over other holidays. In addition to the TELP program, Grady staff are considering offering high school seminars to diversify their portfolio and make themselves available within the communities they serve. Grady has also received requests from parents of middle and elementary school students who are eager for similar programming.

Grady staff is keenly aware of the importance of engaging students at younger levels, as well. Young

people in fifth and sixth grade already begin to think about potential careers, a fact that indicates the worth and feasibility of offering TELP to this age group, providing early exposure to what the health care industry really is.

Success in Building Community

The primary, leading attitude at Grady is that everyone, including the youth participants, are a part of the Grady family as they walk through the halls of the hospital. Although managing and balancing demands can, at times, be daunting, for Grady staff it is a labor of love. As the staff sees the growth and development of these young people, and acknowledges that they have been a part of their journey, they experience a great sense of accomplishment. Even more, the experience of working with these young people gives staff a sense of meaning—they have made a positive impact on another young, aspiring person, ready to learn and make their way into the future.

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