

Mini-Medical School Showcases Medical Careers to School Children

BY RHODA WEISS

The annual On the Waterfront Festival in Rockford, IL, features events, music, and exhibits over the Labor Day weekend. More than 400,000 people attend, making it the perfect place for the Rockford-based University of Illinois College of Medicine's Mini-Medical School, a community outreach program.

"Our involvement came about through a sponsorship with a local radio station," explains Robert Bailey, director of marketing and public relations for the College of Medicine. "We agreed to sponsor the children's stage in return for the opportunity to provide medical education at the festival."

THE MINI-MEDICAL SCHOOL

Sixty volunteers staff the booth throughout the weekend. Medical students, residents, and employees of the college participate in exchange for free admission to the festival. Colorful banners on the college's tent attract children and their families. Children receive a personalized certificate to carry with them through the mini-medical school. On entering the tent, the students go to stations manned by real medical students.

At the first station, the healthy heart check, children use stethoscopes to listen to heartbeats, and the medical student at the station listens to each child's heartbeat. The children receive an A+ on their certificates for completing this station (as they do for all the stations), and proceed to the next station, the eye and ear check. Children use otoscopes to look at others' ears and eyes, and the medical students check the children's ears and eyes and report any unusual findings to the parents. The medical students cannot diagnose or prescribe treatment, but they can offer suggestions—for example to have a child's ears cleaned.

The next station is the poison-control exhibit. Here the children compare two vials of similar-looking fluids (e.g., blueberry juice and window cleaner) and try to guess which one is safe to drink and which is poisonous.

"The purpose of the exhibit is to impress on the



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children the fact that fluid containers found about the house can be very dangerous and should not be touched without a parent's permission," says Bailey.

The final station is a large display by the American Lung Association and hands-on demonstrations on the dangers of smoking. A two-gallon glass jar of tar shows the amount of tar and nicotine absorbed into the body by a 20-year smoker. Children may pick the jar up and view the consistency of the tar. The children may also view, and even touch, a smoker's lung, made available through the medical school's pathology department.

The mini-medical school has helped the college meet several goals:


- Public education on current health issues
- Cost-effective promotion of the college's health centers and clinics
- Opportunities for medical students to practice repetitive medical tasks and skills
- Introduction of medicine and medical careers to young people
- Involvement of the College of Medicine and its students and employees in a local community event

The college also developed a direct-mail marketing list for its women's and children's health centers from registrations for prize drawings.

MORE COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Throughout the year, the college, through a partnership with the American Lung Association, takes the lung exhibit into local schools and reaches hundreds of students. The program is aimed at students in grades 3 through 6. "Our medical students discuss why smoking is dangerous, how smoking advertisements and gimmicks are used to hook a child on tobacco for life, and how to say no to peer pressure to smoke," states Bailey.

In the two years since its inception, the college medical students have spoken in nearly 250 classrooms and reached 7,500 students. □

 For more information, contact Robert Bailey at 815-395-5920.