

PROFILE

MISERICORDIA HOSPITAL

Internships Offer Young People A Chance for a Better Life and Community

Hospitals in inner-city neighborhoods face a special challenge: How can they help their communities build a better future? One way is to encourage area young people to select careers in healthcare and offer them an opportunity to learn about such careers. Philadelphia's 276-bed Misericordia Hospital has been doing just that by inviting students from nearby Turner Middle School to gain first-hand experience in

healthcare careers.

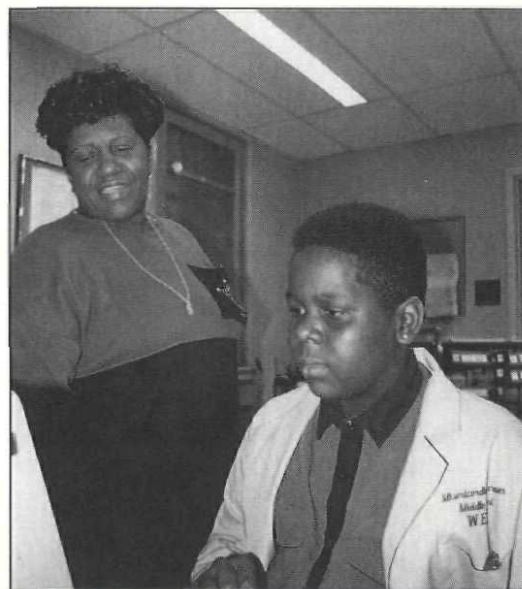
Misericordia internships are made possible by the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC), a volunteer-staffed program developed by the University of Pennsylvania that places junior high and high school students in educational programs outside the school, during the school day.

The WEPIC program was launched in 1985. Today, nine West Philadelphia Schools have year-round WEPIC pro-

grams that teach 1,000 area young people skills such as how to rehab houses and landscape parks and how to teach neighbors about health risks. The Misericordia Hospital program is one of the most-often requested WEPIC programs at Turner Middle School.

The first session was launched in July 1991 by internship program administrators Joseph Nyame, director of respiratory therapy, and Sr. Kathleen Kelly, RSM, director of patient relations. Initially intended as a summer internship, the program was such a hit with students and staff that Misericordia decided to offer it to Turner Middle School students during the school year. This fall the seventh group of students are enrolled in the program, according to Nyame.

Internships are open to students interested in healthcare, students at risk (e.g., those who have learning or social problems), and students who need more focusing (e.g., those who are withdrawn), according to Marie Bogle, Turner Middle



Unit Clerk Juliet Haroy explains patient information to Turner Middle School student Damen Johnson.

School's WEPIC coordinator.

HOLISTIC LEARNING

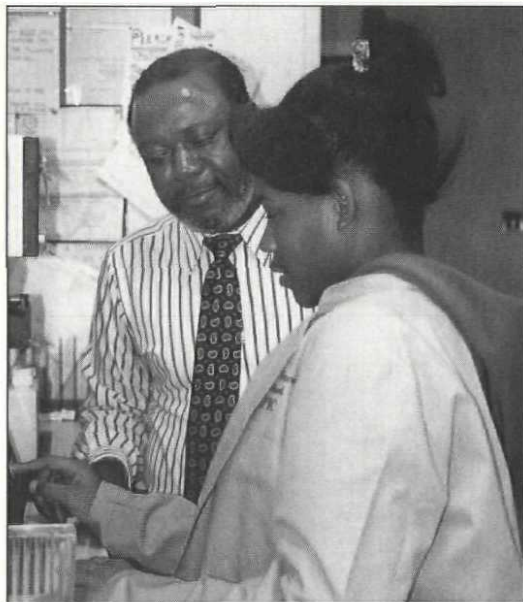
Nursing, radiology, respiratory care, physical therapy, dietary, and community outreach departments sponsor WEPIC internships. After attending two two-hour orientation sessions, students spend two hours a week for four weeks in one department, then move to another department. Two students intern in a department at one time.

Misericordia staff tries to create a "holis-

tic" learning experience for Turner Middle School students. In other words, the staff helps students integrate what they learn at the hospital into routine school work and everyday life, building a foundation for all skills, said Nyame.

Bogle explained that each Monday at school the students prepare for what they will cover at Misericordia on Wednesday. They write a brief journal entry on Thursday to help assimilate what they experienced at the hospital (see Box). In one

Joseph Nyame, RRT, instructs Turner Middle School student Monika Strickland in Misericordia's Blood Gas Laboratory.



instance, after working with patients who have chronic lung diseases, the students and Nyame discussed the physical and monetary effects of cigarette smoking. The students calculated the amount of money that could have been saved by refraining from smoking two packs of cigarettes a day for 10 years, adding to this the estimated cost of healthcare services that may be needed as a result of smoking. The students then discussed what could have been purchased with the money saved—such as a home or a college education.

PROGRAM'S SUCCESS

As a result of the program, some students have improved their

academic performance. The program has also facilitated discussions on students' career goals and other life choices.

One example of the program's effectiveness was demonstrated during the 1991-92 school year. Students were asked to plan and hold a mock health fair. With the help of Misericordia staff and University of Pennsylvania medical student volunteers, Turner students designed posters for the fair and gathered information on health. They even sponsored blood pressure screenings at the fair.

Because of their health fair's success, the students were invited to participate in Misericordia's health fair. They managed a

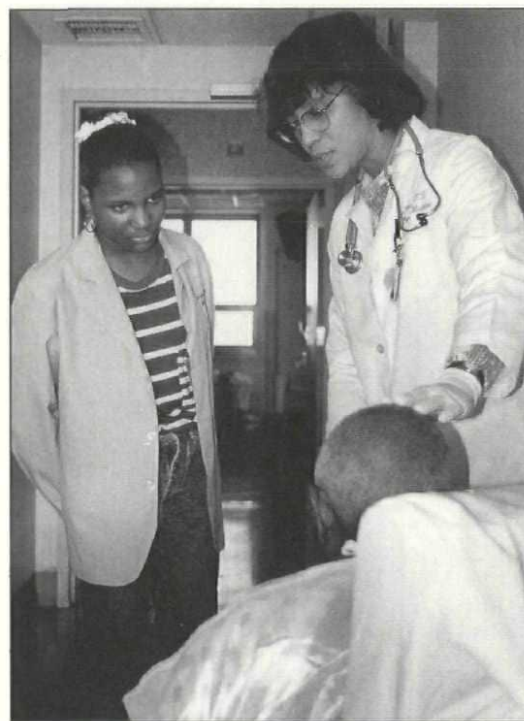
booth and distributed educational information on cancer.

The success of Misericordia Hospital's Turner Middle School internship is seen by students' positive response and the sense of satisfaction they express. "The program gives the students hope," says Bogle. In addition to the first-hand experience, she says, students develop mentor relationships with staff members. When the children see how Misericordia staff members (many of whom grew up in the neighborhood) have succeeded, it builds their self-esteem and raises their confidence to believe they could achieve the same success some day, explains Bogle.

Parents tell Bogle they are proud of what their children are doing at Misericordia. And Misericordia staff members are enthusiastic about the Turner Middle School internship program as well, notes Nyame. Sharon Thompson, a community outreach nurse at the hospital, says the students show a real interest in what they are learning. "We must continue to be open to them and sponsor more programs like this to meet their needs," she adds.

A LIFE OF ITS OWN

The Turner Middle School WEPIC program costs Misericordia Hospital approximately



Markita Fountain listens attentively to Wonza Russell, director of Misericordia's Physical Medicine Department.

\$2,000 a year. This covers lunches, stationery, promotional supplies, a graduation ceremony at the end of the school year, and laboratory coats. The students are especially proud of the gold-colored laboratory coats they receive during their work at Misericordia, said Nyame. Employees' time to manage, direct, and prepare the curriculum is not included in the cost.

"The Turner Middle School program is taking on a life of its own," says Nyame. What began as a summer internship for middle school students is now being expanded to include elementary school children from nearby Transfiguration School.

Misericordia is also trying to get funding to establish a summer apprenticeship program in which former Turner students (now

10th and 11th graders) will work at the hospital for a nominal salary. Nyame sees the apprenticeship program as a way for Misericordia to reinforce its commitment to the students.

At Nyame's request seven African-American nurses have agreed to act as mentors, providing advice and emotional support to the students, who are mostly African American. Nyame plans to address the African-American Nurses Association, attempting to recruit more mentors.

Nyame notes that the program is expanding not only at Misericordia Hospital but also into hospitals across the nation, many of which are turning to him for information on establishing a student internship program of their own.

—Michelle Hey

Student Journal Entries

Dietary

I went to dietary and what I learned was what they do. I put in food orders and helped write out food orders. I learned that you have to know your math to work in this position, and you have to be clean in order to make food for the sick. It taught me a lot about what was important in dietary and what was the purpose in working there.

—Carmen Crippen

Cholesterol Screening

We had a cholesterol screening today. They put a pin in the person's finger. They put the blood on this paper and put it in a machine to tell their cholesterol level. I gave the patients some paper to tell them about their history and gave them information on cholesterol. I learned more about cholesterol. They told the people how they can get low cholesterol. And I liked it a lot.

—Sheree Jenkins