



DRAFT NEWS RELEASE

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**Foundation Supports Program Training the Next Generation of Community Health Advocates**

A grant from the Baxter International Foundation will support a new program training high school juniors and seniors to be health advocates in their own communities. The two-year, \$143,000 grant will fund data collection to measure the program's effectiveness in improving community health and building a pipeline of healthcare workers for the future.

The program, called the CHAMPIONS NETWork, which stands for Community Health And eMPowerment through Integration Of Neighborhood-specific Strategies using a Novel Education & Technology-leveraged Workforce, was spearheaded by the University of Illinois Hospital & Health Sciences System's emergency department and launched this past summer with 27 students from five area high schools.

The program starts with four weeks of classes and training at the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Medicine followed by a two-week internship in the UI Health emergency department, where students screen patients for health conditions and help facilitate follow up care. Students are expected to follow up with patients they screened over the following school year, and help lead health screenings in the schools and communities.

"We are committed to exposing students to careers in health sciences and empowering young people to become health champions in their local communities to help enhance access to critical care," said Stacey Eisen, president of the Baxter International Foundation and vice president, global communications at Baxter. "By training high school students to be advocates for screening and prevention, we can also help improve health disparities in underserved Chicago communities, creating lasting value for residents."



"We know there are several Chicago communities with especially high burden of disease, with limited health resources," said Dr. Terry Vanden Hoek, professor and head of emergency medicine at the UIC College of Medicine and executive director of the CHAMPIONS NETWORK program. "We conceived this program as a doubly beneficial way to help address these health disparities and provide basic health education and training high school students could use to improve health in their neighborhoods and their own academic and job skills."

Collecting data to evaluate all aspects of the program is important, Vanden Hoek said.

"But still, we need to know: did patients who got screened go for follow up care? How many people did each of our students talk to about cardiovascular disease in their neighborhood and did any of those people start exercising more or make health changes? How many of our program graduates went on to a career in the health sciences? Knowing a program is effective is one of the best ways to attract resources to help build the capacity and enlarge its reach," said Vanden Hoek. "This is a key step in helping us broaden the program and disseminate it to other hospitals and emergency departments."

The first class of CHAMPIONS came from five schools located in mostly low-income neighborhoods: UIC College Prep on the Near West Side; Instituto Health Sciences Career Academy in the Lower West Side; Farragut High School in South Lawndale; Senn High School in Edgewater and Clemente High School in West Town. Students submitted applications, wrote an essay and participated in in-person interviews.

Vanden Hoek and colleagues identified Chicago neighborhoods with high levels of cardiovascular disease and cancer, and worked with partners within high schools in those neighborhoods to promote the CHAMPIONS NETWORK program, and get students to apply.

The classroom and hands-on activities include developing community organizing skills, learning about health professions, gaining new knowledge about common health conditions in their communities and learning how to screen for them using questionnaires and guided conversation. Students also visit the UIC College of Medicine Dr. Allan L. and Mary L. Graham Clinical Performance Center, the cadaver lab and learn how to perform hands-only CPR with



Illinois Heart Rescue. Students learn about dozens of health and medical professions and potential career options through their interactions with UIC and UI Health faculty and staff.

The internship portion of the program is spent in the emergency department, where the students screen patients for cardiovascular and cancer risk. They ask patients about their eating habits, and provide information on healthy lifestyle habits. The students also help link patients to primary care within the UI Health system if needed, acting similarly to patient navigators. Afterward, the students follow up with these patients over the phone to see if they made appointments based on their health screenings.

Other partners in the program include the Pritzker Traubert Family Foundation, Chicago Gear Up Alliance, Instituto Health Sciences Career Academy, UIC College Prep, Mikva Challenge, Illinois Heart Rescue, and the Ann & Robert Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago.

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