Health Science and Technology Camp Enjoys Second Year Success

Last summer local high schoolers had fun with science, thanks to Central AHEC and the University of Hartford (UHart). The two organizations partnered again to give teens an exciting two weeks at the second annual Health Science and Technology Camp. By all accounts, the program was bigger and better than the first year—and just continues to grow.

New this year was a presentation from David Napp, Academic Director of the Prosthetics and Orthotics program at UHart. He talked to students about his career path and explained the educational requirements for working in the field of orthotics and prosthetics. The students also received hands-on experience with adapted orthotic limbs for legs and hands.

Other instructors included: Lucy Richard, Director of Clinical Education and Instructor at UHart's Radiologic Technology Program. She gave the students a hands-on experience in the lab. Students identified abnormal images, and used the x-ray machine to calculate the change in radiation level exposure at various distances from the source.

Teresa Frankhauser, AHEC staff and the Camp's instructor detailed her career pathway as a respiratory therapist. She showed students how to use respiratory equipment that identifies pulmonary disease by measuring lung function.

Dr. Jacob Haney, Director of the Neuroscience Graduate program and Biology Department Chair at UHart told of his journey to become a Neuroscientist. He also discussed the physiology behind diabetes and gave the students the results of his research into the Ketogenic diet and its impact on the developing brain.

Dr. David Butts, neurosenscence adjunct professor at UHart also presented his career pathway as a pharmacologist and neuroscientist. He discussed his research using mice models and new drugs to improve protein accumulation in the brain for people with Alzheimer's disease.

Additional opportunities abounded. Students took a trip to the Neuroscience physiology lab to observe an animal dissection. They had the opportunity to identify and harvest the organs. In a separate session they learned from Frankhauser how psychological testing methods are used to observe and categorize the severity of a variety of psychological pathologies such as anxiety and learned helplessness. What a great summer for up-and-coming scientists and medical professionals. One student said, "We really enjoyed the experience in the physiology lab."

According to Central AHEC, the organization will use this and other camper feedback from the 2013 program to make the Health Science and Technology Camp even better in 2014.

MLK Day of Service: A Day On for the Legacy of Greatness

"If you want to be important, wonderful. If you want to this year was a presenta..."
Northwestern CT AHEC Launches “Youth Mental Health First Aid Corps” In Response To Newtown

Northwestern Connecticut AHEC is launching the Youth Mental Health First Aid Corps at AHECs and other community-based organizations across the nation.

In the aftermath of the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT, President Barack Obama and other national, state and local leaders are calling for communities to improve their ability to appropriately respond to the needs of youth experiencing symptoms of a mental illness.

Northwestern Connecticut AHEC responded to this need by partnering with the Corporation for National and Community Service AmeriCorps National Direct and the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare to create the Youth Mental Health First Aid instructors, who are providing Youth Mental Health First Aid certification classes for adults working with youth including teachers, foster parents, juvenile justice professionals, community health workers, first responders and state policy makers and youth.

Sandra is a 44-year-old Latina – a wife, mother of two, and the family’s financial health household. Sandra (not her real name) works as an Office Manager. She has been employed for two years, but has only recently been able to afford insurance payments for her family of four.

New “Assister” Helps Community Navigate Affordable Care Act

16 years and older to encourage peer-to-peer interaction.

Youth Mental Health First Aid Corps AmeriCorps members are serving at host sites across the nation, including in Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Louisiana, Michigan, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island.

Youth Mental Health First Aid is a groundbreaking public education program that helps communities identify, understand, and respond to adolescents (12 to 18 years old) showing signs of a mental illness. The 8-hour certification course introduces participants to the unique risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems in adolescents, builds an understanding of the importance of early intervention, and teaches how to help an adolescent in crisis or experiencing a mental health challenge.

The course teaches participants the risk factors and warning signs of a variety of mental health challenges common among adolescents, including anxiety, depression, psychosis, eating disorders, AD/HD, disruptive behavior disorders, and substance use disorder. Participants do not learn to diagnosis, nor how to provide any therapy or counseling – rather, Youth Mental Health First Aid “Pairs” learn a core five-step action plan to assess a mental health crisis, select intervenors and provide initial help, and connect young people to professional peer, and self-help care.

Youth Mental Health First Aid was created by Professor Anthony Jorm and Betty Kitchener in 2001. The National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare brought Mental Health First Aid to the U.S. in 2008. MHFA has a strong evidence base, four detailed studies have been completed and nearly a dozen journal articles published on MHFA’s impact on public awareness, stigmatizing attitudes about mental illness and application of helping “first aid” behaviors. The Youth Mental Health First Aid Program is adapted from the original program to address mental illnesses affecting adolescents (12–18 years old).

Youth Mental Health First Aid Corps demonstrates Northwestern Connecticut AHEC’s ability to act as a national leader responding to pressing community health care issues.

With the Affordable Care Act calling for sweeping changes in healthcare throughout the nation, states have been discussing ways to reduce costs and improve access to medical care. Connecticut submitted a proposal to training their system to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) in December 2013. If funded, this State Innovation Model (SIM) grant would give Connecticut Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) the opportunity to lead two initiatives in developing the state’s healthcare workforce.

One of these proposals suggests that Connecticut must develop a healthcare workforce that “will fulfill our state’s plan for delivery system reform, and meet current and future needs for health services.” Because workforce development, especially a primary care-centered workforce, is central to the mission of AHEC’s around the state, Connecticut AHEC was asked to provide training in specific areas.

Of the two major workforce development sections, the following two would be spearheaded by CT AHEC if the grant is awarded.

The first initiative will center on training and certification standards for Health First “Aiders.” The plan says: “Connecticut’s Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) to work with Connecticut’s Department of Public Health (DPH) to develop a training and certification process for Community Health Workers (CHW).” Over the past decade, AHEC has gained substantial expertise in this area by developing and operating several small-scale programs, and is now collaborating with other states in the development of their programs. (The plan, available at http://www.healthreform.ct.gov, further details AHEC’s involvement in this initiative on pages 113–114.) The second AHEC-specific initiative will improve Interprofessional Education (IPE) and develop a Connecticut Student Track statewide. From the plan, “Connecticut will build upon its most effective program for community-based interprofessional education, UCOnnect’s Urban Service Track (UST), to establish a Con
cerned for the Student Track (CST). Six professions’ schools are currently participating in UST: Quinnipiac University’s School of Physician Assistant, and the University of Connecticut’s Schools of Dental Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing and Social Work. UST serves disadvantaged populations in urban settings, and stresses team-based care, cultural and linguistic appropriateness, and population health.” (The plan further details AHEC’s involvement in this initiative on pages 115-118.) In the initial grant, Connecticut was provided up to $2,852,355 to design the proposal, according to CMS. A model testing grant would met the state up to another $45 million, architects of the Connecticut plan say. That’s part of the up to $300 million the federal government has devoted to supporting states efforts to design and implement projects nationwide.

According to CMS, the projects are intended to “support the development and testing of state-based models for multi
dayer payment and healthcare delivery system transformation with the aim of improving health system performance for residents of participating states.” Arkansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oregon, and Vermont have each been awarded model testing grants.

These new initiatives would further Connecticut’s mission to improve and expand the state’s primary care workforce and also have a lasting impact on the future of healthcare in Connecticut – and possibly beyond, as a model for other states.

National AHEC Organization’s Mission. To enhance access to quality healthcare, particularly primary and preventive care, by improving the supply and distribution of healthcare professionals through community-based educational partnerships.

AHEC Hosts Undergrads for Health Careers Extenship

In January, the Connecticut Area Health Education Center (AHEC) hosted eight undergraduate students for a one-week health careers internship.

The students were from Cornell University, the University of Connecticut, Trinity College and the University of Rhode Island. The experiences exposed students interested in health professions and/or public health.

The unique opportunities offered during the internship included shadowing in a variety of professional settings: a primary care clinic, an STD or TB clinic, the Pecon Community Center, sanitarians at the University of Connecticut, and medical students in classes at UConn Health. From their experience, each of the student participants felt that they increased their awareness of careers in primary care and public health, and improved their confidence in working with underserved populations.

Eastern CT AHEC Leader Named 2014 Rural Health Fellow

Eastern CT AHEC Executive Director Maritza Bond, MPH, was named one of 15 Rural Health Fellows for 2014 by the National Rural Health Association (NRHA). NRHA is a nonprofit organization that promotes the health and wellbeing of rural Americans and providing leadership on issues through advocacy, communications, education and research. After the completion of a competitive review process, 15 fellows were selected to participate in a six-month intensive educational program aimed at developing leaders who can articulate a clear and compelling vision for rural America. As a fellow Bond will undergo an intensive yearlong skill building program. This will include three advanced leadership training sessions; several NRHA conferences; community outreach calls on rural health leadership, policy and strategic planning; and a guided group project that will provide insight into the evolving nature of rural health policy analysis on a national level. The NRHA membership is made up of 8,000 members, including more than 1,000 hospitals and organizations, all of whom share the common bond of an interest in rural health.