

Program for young students increases interest in college attendance and medical careers

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Two new studies have shown that a unique program in East Harlem that helps middle school students learn practical health skills and gain a better understanding of medical conditions, such as diabetes and hypertension, resulted in increased interest in college attendance and medical careers among the students who attended the program. The results were presented at the American Public Health Association (APHA) Annual Meeting this month in Denver.

The MedStart Summer Enrichment Program was created in the summer of 2009 by Edward Chu and Melissa Schneiderman, two third-year medical [students](#) at Mount Sinai School of Medicine. The free, one-week summer program is offered to East Harlem middle-school students who are interested in science and medicine, or who would benefit from a more interactive approach to learning. MedStart provides the participants with CPR and First Aid certification, and teaches them practical skills, such as how to take a pulse, and measure blood pressure. The program also provides transit passes, lunch, T-shirts, and trophies, at no cost to the students, for completing the program.

"East Harlem has one of the highest rates of asthma, diabetes, and obesity in all of New York City," said Chu. "We started the MedStart program because there was a significant unmet need for health care education among the youth of East Harlem about these diseases. A large number of medical students, residents, and faculty members were willing

to dedicate time to help address this need, and MedStart was our solution."

The research team behind MedStart evaluated the impact of the program and presented the results at the APHA meeting. One study evaluated the impact of student attitudes toward science and medical careers before and after the program. Thirty-eight students completed the pre-program survey and 37 completed the post-survey. At the conclusion of the program, there was a 31 percent increase in students who were "very interested" in science, a 23 percent increase in students who were "very interested" in a career in the medical field, and a 13 percent increase in students who thought it was important to attend college.

A second study evaluated improvement in student knowledge of diseases prevalent in their community—asthma, diabetes, obesity, and heart disease—by surveying 39 students before and after the program. Comparing the students' pre-camp survey and post-camp survey performance, we found that their scores increased by an average of 26.5 percent. The majority of students previously were unaware of the high prevalence of these diseases in their community.

"These results demonstrate that the MedStart program improves middle school perceptions of health and science, encouraging them to someday consider careers in these fields," said Stephanie H. Factor, MD, MPH, Assistant Professor of Medicine and faculty advisor for MedStart.

"MedStart also educates these students at a critical time in their lives about prevalent diseases in the East Harlem community. The measurable impact of this program shows that it should be replicated in communities around the country."

Provided by The Mount Sinai Hospital

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