

## High School Students Get Nursing Career Advice



August 2003 - After spending a week in the Mohawk Valley exploring nursing careers, Daria Valez is ready to buckle down and study hard when she returns to her high school in the Bronx. Her dream is to become a nurse, a career that is in high demand as the large cohort of Baby Boomers approach retirement age.

Daria was one of 11 students hosted by Utica College, one of four colleges in the state selected to participate in the New York State Education Department's first Empire Promise Nurse Opportunity Corps, a statewide workforce development initiative designed to address the critical shortage of nurses by encouraging and preparing high school students to enter careers in nursing and to serve communities in New York State.

"It's going to take a lot of studying to get a bachelor's degree in nursing, but I'm willing to do it," Daria said after spending the afternoon at Rome Memorial Hospital, where she had an opportunity to talk with nurses and see what they do.

"This program really helped us learn about the many opportunities available in nursing," said Erica Acosta, also from the Bronx. "It's a great opportunity and we're grateful to everyone who made this program possible."

During their week of residency at Utica College, the students had an opportunity to learn what nursing is all about before finalizing their career decisions, according to Libby Gleasman, RN, NP, who helped coordinate the program along with Claudette Abounader, RN, NP, and Cathy Antonacci, RN, PhD, all faculty members at Utica College.

"The students were able to network with people who have a passion about nursing," Gleasman said. In addition to Rome Memorial Hospital, the students visited the Mohawk Valley Heart Institute and enjoyed some of the community's local attractions.

"The program and the students exceeded our expectations," said Antonacci. "All of the young ladies were enthusiastic and excited and they came together as a team to really get the most out of this program."

"We're proud to be involved in career exploration programs. Through them, we nurture tomorrow's workforce," said Gale Barone, BS, RN, director of education at Rome Memorial Hospital. "This program is particularly exciting because of the ongoing mentoring and support that these future nurses will receive as they pursue their dreams."

According to Antonacci, the program will continue with mentoring for the students throughout the year to help them excel in school. Next year, the students will return to

the Mohawk Valley for more in-depth teaching and hands-on opportunities. “If they work hard through the program, they will be guaranteed admission into one of the baccalaureate nursing programs at the four colleges participating in the program,” Antonacci said.

The Empire Promise Nurse Opportunity Corps, offered in collaboration with the New York State Board for Nursing, the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) and its Foundation, is one component of NYSED’s Liberty Partnerships Programs, which target at-risk youth from across the state and prepares them for competitive entry into postsecondary education and the workforce. The annual student/school persistence rate of students in the program is 98 percent.

The Nurse Opportunity Corps provides high school students with summer residential sessions on college campuses over three years that include pre-professional orientation, workshops, clinical experiences, tutoring and mentoring. The program’s mission is to “prepare nurses to serve the community and the state as world class professionals who are effective leaders and advocates for equitable, high quality and culturally sensitive health care for all.”

Funding for the program at Utica College was provided by the Central New York Area Health Education Center (AHEC).

In addition to Daria and Erica, the participating students included Evangeline Cesar, Cynthia Cessant, Jennifer Campbell, Geraldine Alvarez, Taina Silverio, Riuyinosa Egharevba, and Jennifer Campbell, all from the Bronx; and Heather “Pebbles” Palmer – Smith and Heather Needham, both of Utica.