

WesternU COMP-Northwest Supports AHEC's Annual Summer Camp for Aspiring Health Care Students

WesternU COMP-Northwest hosted the Oregon Pacific AHEC Summer Camp, giving high schoolers hands-on health care experience and mentorship from medical students.



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Western University of Health Sciences'

College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific-Northwest (COMP-Northwest), which is in the process of transitioning to its new name, the Heatherington College of Osteopathic Medicine, recently hosted the Oregon Pacific Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Summer Camp for high school students for the third consecutive year.

Oregon Pacific AHEC is part of a national network dedicated to improving the distribution, diversity, quality, and supply of health care professionals serving rural and medically underserved areas. Through partnerships with local communities and academic institutions, the program promotes access to high-quality health care and supports the development of future medical professionals.

Organized by Oregon Pacific AHEC Director Jaime Montgomery and COMP-Northwest Assistant Professor of Population Health Science and Community Health Co-Chief Jeannie Davis, EdD, the four-day summer camp provided high school students with immersive, hands-on experiences designed to introduce them to the wide range of opportunities available in health care. Students from Lebanon, Albany, Scio, Salem, and California participated in ultrasound sessions, medical imaging workshops, tours of the Simulated Medicine and Readiness Training (SMaRT) Lab, and fetal pig dissections. They also attended a presentation by students from WesternU's College of Health Sciences-Northwest (CHS-Northwest) that highlighted the path to becoming a physical therapist.

The camp's success was strengthened by community partnerships that extended learning beyond the WesternU campus. At Linn-Benton Community College (LBCC), participants explored imaging software and learned about academic programs in nursing, diagnostic imaging,

phlebotomy, and dental assisting. The Lebanon Fire District led a Stop the Bleed training session, providing participants with a one-year certification at no cost. Lebanon Community Hospital also welcomed students into its laboratories, where they observed careers in chemistry, hematology, and pathology and learned about opportunities within hospital lab sciences.

Throughout the week, COMP-Northwest medical students and Oregon State University pre-med students volunteered to assist with workshops and mentor participants. Dr. Davis said the collaboration between medical students and high schoolers created a dynamic and engaging learning environment. "During the OMM (Osteopathic Manipulative Medicine) session, the medical students worked together to tell the high school students what they've been learning in class. It was pretty fascinating, and the students actually got to get up and kind of look at body structure and function," shared Dr. Davis. "They partnered the kids up together to see if their shoulders were aligned or to look at their gait. It was very active, very hands-on, and very interesting. The kids thought it was neat that the medical students were kind of learning with them. There were a lot of giggles."

Second-year COMP-Northwest student Jessica Meechan, who volunteered all four days, said the experience was especially meaningful. "I enjoyed just interacting with the high schoolers and talking about their interests and what they want to go into," said Meechan. "It was fun to just kind of connect with them. When I was in high school, there was no medical school nearby, so I never went to a summer camp at a medical school, let alone learned or did workshops with medical students. So, it was fun to be able to connect with them like this."

The camp is fully funded through state and federal grants and is free for all participants. Students received a camp T-shirt, lunch each day, and a medical supply kit to practice taking vitals at home. Montgomery noted that these kits often continue to benefit students beyond the program. "One of our past participants now works as an Emergency Medical Responder and still keeps his camp bag in his fire station locker," she said. "It's rewarding to see how this experience can influence their future careers."

A highlight of this year's program was the opportunity for campers to attend the Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) White Coat Ceremony on August 1. Montgomery described it as a particularly moving experience. "It was really powerful. As soon as it started, phones were in pockets and they were just like, 'this is the coolest thing to watch, because you can see all the first-year medical students and how this is the coolest moment of their life when they walk out.' So, the high schoolers thought it was pretty special to be able to come and watch," said Montgomery.

About Western University of Health Sciences

Western University of Health Sciences (www.westernu.edu), located in Lebanon, Oregon and Pomona, Calif., is an independent nonprofit health professions university, conferring degrees in osteopathic medicine, physical therapy, biotechnology and pharmaceutical sciences, dental medicine, medical sciences, nursing, optometry, pharmacy, physician assistant studies, podiatric

medicine and veterinary medicine. WesternU is home to [WesternU Health](#), where the best in collaborative health care services is offered.

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