

High School Programs Attract Next Generation of Oral Health Professionals

By Melody Finnemore

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ONE OF THE MOST REWARDING

ASPECTS of Paula Jacobs' job is receiving emails and visits from former students who, upon graduating from high school, go on to study dentistry-related professions in college.

“This is sort of their home base, and they let us know how they are doing,” said Jacobs, an instructor with the Beaverton School District's Health Careers Program. “We love getting updates.”

Health Careers is a magnet program that attracts students from several high schools. Established 47 years ago, it has grown from about 30 students its first year to 300 this year. Students can start during their junior year, and the first year — the year Jacobs teaches — is about exploration.

“A lot of kids come in and know they want to be part of medicine, so we try to get kids to look at all aspects of health care to find their areas of interest,” she said, adding students learn about medical terminology, ethics, HIPAA, first aid and CPR, and begin researching colleges as well.

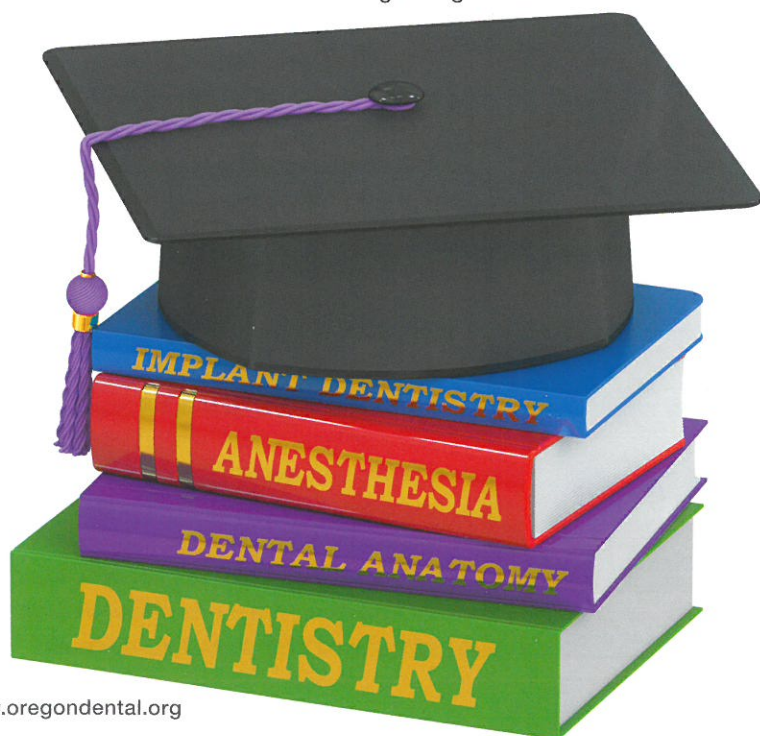
Students who meet the criteria to move on to the second year of the program have the opportunity to gain more than 60 hours of training in local clinics. They can also participate in the Dental Molars Club, where students can engage in hands-on learning activities and hear from guest speakers who can share their experiences and advice as dental professionals.

Jacobs said partnerships with local dentists and clinics are essential to the Health Careers Program's success. “All of the dentists we partner with love what they do, and then that passion is projected onto the kids. Some kids learn that this is absolutely perfect for them; and others learn that it is not, and that's good, too.”

She noted that the program is seeking not only to increase the number of students who participate, but also the real-world experiences it can provide. “We're always looking at other options about how we can incorporate more dental assisting, but we come into a facilities issue. We need more space, we need more instructors and things of that nature,” Jacobs said.

Benson Polytechnic High School also offers a pre-dental and dental assisting program through its Health Sciences program. In February 2016, a new 1,400-square-foot health clinic opened on the high school's campus, providing a training grounds for students who want to become health care providers. The clinic is staffed by residents from OHSU and faculty from the Family Medicine Department.

When the clinic opened, Paul Anthony, a member of the Portland Public Schools Board of Education, said plans for the clinic included allowing participants in the dentistry program to care for students, as the leading cause of unexpected absences in the district was tooth pain, according to an article in *The Portland Tribune*. ●



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