I spent five weeks as an intern in the Center for Community Health Improvement (CCHI) at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. I worked mainly in support of the Youth Programs division, helping the CCHI to prepare summer employment opportunities for 152 Boston high school and college students throughout several hospital departments.

Youth Programs Background

Research shows that educational attainment is the largest predictor of personal health status. As of 2012, the US ranks 48th among developed countries in quality of math and science education, and 27th in proportion of college students earning undergraduate degrees in those fields. These degree holders earn higher wages, regardless of whether they work in the field of their degree (American Youth Policy Forum 2012).

Boston’s student population is 39% African American, 37% Hispanic, 13% Caucasian, and 9% Asian and Pacific Islander, and 72% qualify for free or reduced lunch. There is a high acceptance rate to two and four year colleges (70%), but only 41% graduate from college.

The CCHI, an MGH funded department, provides intensive science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) exploration, health and wellness education, mentoring, internships, college preparation, and summer employment to nearly 500 engineering, and math (STEM) exploration, health and wellness education, Health careers and what it takes to become a health professional.

CCHI Youth Programs Overarching Goal

“The MGH Boston Youth Programs strive to generate genuine excitement and provide exposure to Boston students in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). The aim of the program is to create a ‘me too’ attitude toward students’ achievement of personal and professional success.”

Youth Programs Offered

• STEM and Sr. STEM clubs (grade 3-8) – students increase curiosity and interest in STEM subjects through hands-on activities, experiments, field trips, and guest speakers.
• Science Fair Mentoring (grade 7-8) – through a 22 year partnership with the James P. Timilty Middle School, students are mentored by MGH employees throughout the science fair project process.
• Youth Scholars (grade 9-12) – a four year program for high school students interested in STEM that meets once per week at MGH. Students learn about public health, participate in research and shadowships, receive mentoring, and do college preparation. They also complete a year long internship in a hospital department.
• Summer Jobs (grade 8-12) – MGH is a very large summer employer of youth, giving many students their first jobs. Students are placed in departments throughout the hospital.
• Alumni Program (college) – graduates of the youth scholars program participate in summer paid internships while attending workshops and increasing networking opportunities.
• National Job Shadow Day – youth experience a day in the life of an MGH professional.
• MGH site visits – local student groups are hosted by MGH to learn more about health careers and what it takes to become a health professional.

Summer Jobs

MGH is the largest health care employer in the city of Boston, and it is also the largest summer employer of high school students as part of Mayor Menino’s Boston Corporate Summer Jobs Campaign. The program exposes young people to the health care field through meaningful job placements in almost any hospital department, and workshops are designed to support professional development for the students. Students are able to return each year, and for many, it is their first job. A partnership has been in place between MGH and schools in Boston, Charlestown, Chelsea, and Revere.

In 2011, 495 Boston students participated in a variety of Youth Programs run by the CCHI.

In 2011, 332 MGH employees including administrative and support staff, researchers, and health practitioners volunteered their time with the CCHI Youth Programs, totaling 33,576 volunteer hours.

Conclusions

The CCHI Youth Programs measures its success each year both through the number of students that it reaches and through survey feedback. Students in the Youth Scholars program report feeling an increased sense of competence in science, an increased sense of support from adults, and an increase in planning for their futures. Greater than 50% of the population of Boston consists of people of color, and the population of health care professionals there does not come close to matching that statistic. The rest of the state of Massachusetts and the country are becoming more and more diverse, and we will need a physician population that is sensitive to the specific needs of people from all backgrounds. Raising interest in STEM careers among youth of diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic status is the first step toward this goal.