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CAPS leads students to experiment with innovation

NICK SKODA Staff Writer Apr 18, 2019



St. Charles County
CAPS
Center for Advanced Professional Studies

Saint Charles County CAPS student Mikayla Bowman, 17, was recognized at the April 10 Wentzville Board of Alderman meeting for her work in the health care field.

Centers for Advanced Professional Studies, or CAPS, programs are popping up in school systems all over the country.

The CAPS programs give students the opportunity to gain real work experience while still in high school. The Saint Charles County CAPS program offers course and experience opportunities in the healthcare field, global business entrepreneurship and technology solutions.

"Every Tuesday and Thursday I attend a hospital where I am assigned to shadow a specific department or medical professional. My favorite rotation thus far has been the surgical rotation, where I have the opportunity to observe surgeries in the Operating Room," Bowman said.

Through CAPS, she has had the chance to observe six different surgeries.

While shadowing in the surgical department, Mikayla became aware of the large amount of medical waste produced in surgeries.

She also learned that much of the waste was sterile due to the fact that it was used prior to the procedure and not an actual device used during the procedure.

"I contacted the surgical department at SSM St. Joseph Hospital in Lake Saint Louis, where I observe surgeries. I asked if they had a project that I could do for them and we came up with the idea of finding a way to either recycle or reduce the amount of blue wrap waste in the Operating Room," Bowman said.

Blue wrap she is a sterile plastic wrap used to cover surgical equipment in order to keep the item, or items, sterile. It is a water resistant and breathable material.

Even after use, the blue wrap is still considered sterile but gets thrown away with the rest of the operating room waste and is then contaminated.

"I researched the specific statistics about how much money is being used on the blue wraps per case and calculated how much money is used per year and the findings were astonishing. I knew that there had to be something to reduce the amount of blue wrap wasted," Bowman said.

The first step in this was to find out if the blue wrap was recyclable and if that would be cost effective for the hospital. It was.

After discovering that, Bowman reached out to local recycling companies to see if they'd be interested in taking the blue wrap.

Bowman learned quickly that it would be difficult to have the blue wrap recycled without the hospital paying for it.

CAPS programs give offer unique insight into professional workplaces to young students who have, in the past, had no way of knowing what these places were like, often until the time they have graduated college.

“Through my site visits, observational rotations and by simply talking to medical professionals, I have learned what it takes to be in each specific department of medicine. I was able to discover things that I can handle as well as things I can’t handle and I am very grateful for that,” Bowman said.

She added, “I have learned so many different skills the last two semesters and I will carry my experiences from CAPS with me for the rest of my life.”