

Local Health Career Program for Youth Wins National Award

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SHARON, CT -- A locally developed and initiated health career program for youth has gained national recognition. The Catskill Hudson Area Health Education Center (CHAHEC) has been awarded the high honor of the National Center Award for Excellence in the category of Health Careers Recruitment for Scrubs Club: Pathways to Health Careers.

Scrubs Club is an activity-based, health career exploration program designed to enhance high school students' knowledge of a broad array of health occupations through interactive programs, hands-on activities, and meaningful field trips. The curriculum is designed to encourage students to consider health careers as a future choice by inspiring them to complete their high school education and to continue to post-secondary studies in health occupations.

The Scrubs Club program was conceptualized and initiated by **Gertrude O'Sullivan**, Director of Communications and Special Programs at the **Foundation for Community Health**, in 2011 by spearheading a collaborative effort to design a customized healthcare career program that would benefit youth in the Foundation's service area in northeast Dutchess and southeast Columbia Counties in New York and **northwest Litchfield County in Connecticut**. The program was then developed and released in 2013 at CHAHEC through the leadership of Kathryn Reed, who has since retired as CHAHEC executive director.

This outstanding honor was presented at the recent annual conference of the National AHEC Organization in Washington, D.C., which represents a network of more than 300 AHEC program offices and centers that serve over 85 percent of counties in the United States.

On behalf of the program's developers, the organization's current three-person staff consisting of Kathy Doyle, Carolyn Steele and Roxanna Raffa, RN, and its Board of Directors, the award was accepted by Rob Wingate, CHAHEC's current executive director, in front of a cheering audience of 450 people including dozens of

individuals representing peer organizations around the United States that have already arranged for local schools to make use of this innovative program.

The pilot program began at Dover High School, NY, in the fall of 2012 and in the spring of 2015 evaluations were conducted of the 31 graduating seniors who had participated in the three-year program. The results indicated that 90% of the students planned on continuing their education and 85% were influenced by the program to pursue health care careers. Among other attributes that make the program appealing to schools are that it meets New York State Career Development & Occupational Studies Core Curriculum and Learning Standards, and so can be used in the “daytime” curriculum as well as in the form of an after-school club.

When it was in development, the program’s initial planning committee consisted of Elizabeth Phillips (HRHCare Health Center), Kathryn Reed (former CHAHEC executive director), Kaye Surman (former Dover Councilwoman), Elaine Trumpetto (Dutchess County Council on Addiction, Prevention & Education) and Gertrude O’Sullivan (FCH).

FCH has awarded grants to provide the program curriculum in all of the school districts in its service area, including towns in Litchfield County, Connecticut, and Columbia and Dutchess counties in New York. Additionally, the program is being utilized in 10 school districts in New York State and in nine other states. FCH also supports Scrubs Club through its membership and leadership on the Eastern Dutchess Rural Health Network, which is a partnering sponsor of Scrubs Club.

Photo Caption: (L-R) Gertrude O’Sullivan, Foundation for Community Health, with Kathy Reed, Rob Wingate and staff and board members of Catskill Hudson Area Health Education Center.

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