Scrubs Club gains national recognition

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FCH Director of Communications and Special Programs Gertrude O'Sullivan, far left, celebrated the Scrubs Club’s latest honor with former and current Catskill Hudson Area Health Education Center staff and board members. Photo submitted

DOVER — Scrubs Club, a health career exploration program for high school students first piloted at Dover High School in 2012, recently gained national recognition.

The Catskill Hudson Area Health Education Center (CHAH-EC), the organization that manages the curriculum for Scrubs Club, received the National Center Award for Excellence in the category of health careers recruitment for the program.

The award was given at the National Area Health Education Center Organization conference in Washington, D.C.

Creating Scrubs Club

The idea of Scrubs Club was conceptualized and initiated by Gertrude O’Sullivan, director of communications and special programs at the Foundation for Community Health (FCH) in Sharon, Conn.

O’Sullivan said her interest to create the program arose from promoting health care careers in rural areas with the hopes of attracting students to “practice in our communities when they’re finished with their education.

“For quite a few years, I had been looking at the lack of health care workers we have in our community,” she said. “I’ve been looking at it in all different levels in trying to determine how we could attract or keep, or train people to fill those gaps in our community as far as health care is concerned.

“In 2010, I attended a session at a rural health conference and the session was a program that worked with high school students to introduce them to health careers by raising their self-esteem and confidence,” she added. “I looked into duplicating that program in our own area. When I saw this program at the session I attended I was very, very impressed with it.”

The program works with high school students throughout their four years.

“It started working with high school students at an early level — in their first year of high school — and continues to work with them throughout their four years, so as they’re going through the period when they’re beginning to look at schools or even considering if they should go on to higher education, the program was involved with them in working to help them make that decision,” O’Sullivan said.

According to her, to produce a program identical the one presented at the rural health conference was impossible for many reasons. The one that stood out the most was a financial challenge. That program had a $100,000 budget financed by a Johnson and Johnson grant — something that was
not available for this area.

Despite the challenges met at first, O'Sullivan said, she reached out to colleagues in the area interested to see if it was possible to create a tailored version of a health career oriented program for high schoolers.

O’Sullivan was able to find several colleagues willing to cooperate and created a committee to help develop the curriculum. The committee included Elizabeth Phillips from Hudson River HeathCare, Elaine Trumpetto from Dutchess County Council on Addiction, Prevention and Education, Kathryn Reed from CHAHEC and Dover Councilwoman Kaye Surman.

Additionally, many donations were received to get the project off its feet.

“The in-kind donations were phenomenal,” O’Sullivan said, adding that a total of approximately $10,000 was donated to carry out the pilot program at Dover High School.

Initial years

Scrubs Club was launched in the fall of 2012 at Dover High School with 31 students participating.

The program was welcomed with much enthusiasm by Superintendent of Schools Mike Tierney and other staff and faculty.

“Scrubs Club is a fantastic program because it does a number of things for the students,” Tierney said. For one, he added, “it opens the students' eyes and shows the importance of health care and all careers available in that field, especially for kids who may not want to be a nurse or doctors.”

The program exposes students not just to hospital setting opportunities, but it also teaches them of the opportunities available at the local government and health institution level among others.

The program also provides educational field trip opportunities to museums and more.

“I attended on one of the field trips to the Body Exhibit in New York City, and I was excited to see how enthusiastic the students and parents were — it was encouraging,” said O’Sullivan.

Making a difference

According to O’Sullivan, 31 students completed the three-year pilot program in 2015 and were asked to participate in a survey.
The results showed 90 percent of the graduating students planned to further their education, and 85 percent were influenced to pursue a health care career.

“It is an incredible feeling, just to realize that you do your job at the local level and you get involved with something you think has true potential and has the power to make a difference at some point,” O’Sullivan said. “I’m so happy to see the program took off on its own and to find out that it has grown so much, but most importantly to see the results it has had among Dover students. To see the results there is reassuring.”

Growing beyond borders

Scrubs Club saw its beginnings at Dover High School, but the program has grown in popularity at many school districts within FCH’s service area and the state of New York.

The club is offered as an extracurricular activity in 10 school districts in New York state, including the North East (Webutuck) Central School District.

School districts interested in learning more about the Scrubs Club should contact the Catskill Hudson Area Heath Education Center.