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From: Missouri Area Health Education Centers

Oral Health Career Awareness and Exploration Program (OHCAP)

The Oral Health Career Awareness and Exploration Program (OHCAP) is for high school students who wish to pursue a career in the oral health care field. This field includes dentists, dental hygienists, dental assistants, and dental lab technicians. Students participating in OHCAP are exposed to the following activities:

Hands-on Development of Dental Skills	Dissection Labs
Nutrition and Oral Health	College Access
Exposure to Careers in Oral Health	Mentor Program
Job Shadowing	Service Learning Project
And much more!	

There are currently two schools in the Southeastern Missouri Area Health Education Center's (SEMO AHEC) region participating in OHCAP. Those schools are the Sikeston Career & Technology Center and South Pemiscot High School.

OHCAP has been integrated into the curriculum of the Health Occupations I class at the Sikeston Career & Technology Center. Through the first four monthly sessions of the 2014-2015 school year, the 34 student participants have already learned the following: how oral health can affect your overall health, how nutrition can affect your oral health, how to build a resume and explore oral health careers through the Missouri Connections website, and how our mouths work during chewing. A mink dissection demonstrates problems that can arise involving our teeth. These students have also implemented a community service project educating 5th and 6th grade students on the importance of proper oral health care.

South Pemiscot High School has taken a slightly different approach by using OHCAP to start an oral health career club. Nine students who hope to pursue a career in dentistry have joined the club for the 2014-2015 school year. SEMO AHEC staff meets with the club once a month to provide students with oral health-related presentations and hands-on experiential learning activities. Some of these hands-on activities have included: using agar plates to grow bacteria from mouth swabs in order to examine the difference before and after brushing; dissection of a mink to remove teeth and visualize the muscles involved in chewing; and learning how to perform an intra-oral examination on a "patient" to check the mouth for signs of vitamin deficiencies.

The club sponsor at South Pemiscot High School said: "We are so excited to have SEMO AHEC to offer services to our students at South Pemiscot. We live in an area where there aren't as many opportunities that some of the bigger schools may have. Our students are now able to experience health care related occupations on a different level. They have been exposed to new things such as CPR training, injections, dissection labs, and are now doing oral health care. Our students love getting to participate in these events and we hope that it continues to be available for years to come."

Funding for this project is provided by the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. The East Central Missouri AHEC and West Central Missouri AHEC are also involved in the project.

MAHEC: Connecting students to careers, professionals to communities, and communities to better health

A student from Sikeston Career & Technology Center's Health Occupations I class teaches a 5th grader how to properly brush and floss.

MAHEC is a partnership of seven locally-governed organizations and three university-based health professions education programs working statewide to increase the numbers of Missouri youth entering stable, high-paying jobs as healthcare professionals and the numbers of professionals caring for underserved populations.

The MAHEC partners include:

- A.T. Still University – Kirksville
- University of Missouri – Columbia
- Saint Louis University
- Northeast Missouri AHEC – Kirksville
- Northwest Missouri AHEC – St. Joseph
- West Central Missouri AHEC – Lexington
- Mid-Missouri AHEC – Rolla
- East Central Missouri AHEC – St. Louis
- Southeastern Missouri AHEC – Poplar Bluff
- Southwest Missouri AHEC – Springfield