

Each Day, Healthier Together | 2010 Report to Community

Hospital employees inspire students with passion – and a little drama

When working to engage a classroom of junior high students, it is often helpful for a presenter to use a little real-life drama. For Melissa Wittstock, an operating room nurse at Hudson Hospital & Clinics, some photos do the trick.

Wittstock is one of several professionals from Hudson Hospital & Clinics who volunteers to discuss her career at Somerset Middle School's Career, Academic and Personal & Social Skills (CAPS) class.

"The students were so quiet initially," Wittstock says of a recent presentation. "But then I pulled up photos and x-rays of hand trauma. The patient's pinky finger and ring finger had been severed in a biking accident, then repaired in the operating room. This got the students' attention! They started firing questions and sharing their own experiences."

One of the students is Samantha Waalen, 12, a seventh grader from New Richmond. She and her classmates like to hear about all different types of professions, but the health science presenters always leave a big impression.

"I felt like 'wow,' they are saving people's lives!" Waalen says.

The purpose of the presentations isn't to cement any specific career goals for the students, according to Amy Young, Somerset Middle School Counselor. Rather, she wants to expose them to a range of career options.

"They are pretty young, so we like to talk in generalities," Young explains. "We encompass everything in the health field, from accounting to respiratory therapy."

She appreciates the school's partnership with Hudson Hospital & Clinics because it gives her class easy access to many types of professionals who love to inspire students with an accurate picture of their field, she says.

For Wittstock, inspiration is the key. She says, as a child, she dreamed of a career in nursing, but then worked in the insurance industry for 12 years. In her 30s, she went back to school to become a nurse.

"I love working in the operating room at Hudson Hospital & Clinics. I can help patients when they are at their most vulnerable. I make sure they come out of surgery safely," Wittstock says. "To me, it's important to continue to encourage students to consider nursing as a fulfilling way to help others. Our country will need more nurses in the years ahead."

Marty Richards, MD, an emergency department physician at Hudson Hospital & Clinics, also enjoys meeting with the CAPS class.

"I think it's important for students to understand some of the training and education that is involved in careers, including those in the health care field," he says. "I want them to know that health care careers are rewarding and that a great deal of preparation is needed for a career in medicine."

For student Waalen, the health care presentations raise her already high esteem of the profession. She explains that when she was in fifth grade, she went to the emergency department, where she saw a team of people working to help a girl who had been injured in a car accident.

"The doctors and nurses helped her and I thought it was pretty amazing. From that experience, I thought I really want to help other people like that," she recalls. "After listening to the health care presentations in my CAPS class, I know that doctors and nurses have to go to school for a lot of years. But, yeh, I think I can do that. If you can survive elementary school, middle school and high school, I think you can survive college, too."