Compounding the next generation

Cochise College Pharmacy Camp introduces science to kids

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Pharm Camp students grab items to include in their poster board projects. The students learn about toxicology and a host of other STEM applications. The camp is a collaboration between the University of Arizona College of Pharmacy and the Cochise College Pre Pharm Club.

Mark Levy
SIERRA VISTA — Every summer, children from across the county flock to the classrooms at Cochise College for a week of Pharmacy Camp. The free camp is jam packed with hands-on learning labs and lectures to familiarize students with the world of science.

Oscar Diaz, a student at Cochise College studying pre-pharmacy and a camp counselor, said the week-long day camp is a good way to introduce science to youngsters and get them out of the house during the summer.

“It’s been a really good thing for the community because we bring in kids from all over the region,” Diaz said.

The program is a five-day intensive camp that completely emmerses kids into the science field and are presented with the opportunity to learn how to make everyday materials like lip balm and lotion in a college lab setting.

Diaz said the camp is funded in part by the pre-pharmacy club on campus and the University of Arizona. The university supports the camp with professional supplies and UA faculty members who lectured to the campers about science.

“Really, the stuff that we need to run the camp is donated by the U of A,” he said. “Associate Dean (Theodore) Tong, from the University of Arizona College of Pharmacy, he comes down and coordinates a lot of this with us.”

Aaron Pearse, a UA pharmacy student and camp counselor, started as camp counselor when the program began in 2012. This was his second year as camp counselor and got involved after a UA pharmacy advisor suggested he help out.

“I like introducing the kids to the medical field and show them the different sciences,” Pearse said. “(It’s important) to develop the next generation of scientists.”

Diaz said the camp isn’t just about studying and reading text books. Instead, he said one of the main goals of the camp is to get kids interested in science and understand its importance in everyday life.

“We take them through little workshops that teach them about different aspects of health,” Diaz said. “Even though the camp is pharm camp and it’s pharmacy related, some of the stuff that they’ve been doing throughout the week have to do with STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) in general.”
At the end of the week, the campers had to put their knowledge to the test. They were split up into small groups and focused on specific topics that involved some of the science they learned about over the last few days.

One group decided to do their presentation on the national opioid crisis. The four campers constructed a tri-fold poster board with information on what the crisis is and how the chemicals from the opioids affect the brain.

“The withdrawal is the worst thing,” said 12-year-old camper Elena Norris.

For 10-year-old camper Krista Valenzuela, the camp was an exciting new experience filled with learning and new friends. But, at first, she didn’t see it that way. Valenzuela thought the camp sounded “boring” but she was soon proved wrong and ended up loving the camp.

“It’s been a good time being here and learning new things,” Valenzuela said.

Jenny Ou, an 11-year-old camper, echoed much of what Valenzuela had to say and expects to she herself coming back in years to come.

“I’ve learn a lot more things than I didn’t know before. I realized that there is a lot more science than I thought there was that you can use for everyday life,” Ou said. “It (the camp) was very fun for me the first time and I thought that I should come again.”