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UF COM students introduce PACE teens to careers in health care

The teenagers stared at tiny premature babies fidgeting inside the incubators in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at [Shands at UF](#) and touched a small diaper held by a nurse.

It was 16-year-old Jeremisha's first time visiting a NICU, but she hopes to work with mothers and infants someday.

"I want to go to the Air Force and be a midwife," she said.

Jeremisha was one of 10 girls, aged 13 to 17 years old, from the local PACE Center for Girls Inc. that visited with UF College of Medicine students Feb. 13.

PACE Alachua is one of 17 PACE centers in Florida. The school, located in Gainesville, provides counseling, education and training to about 40 at-risk female students, ages 12 through 18.

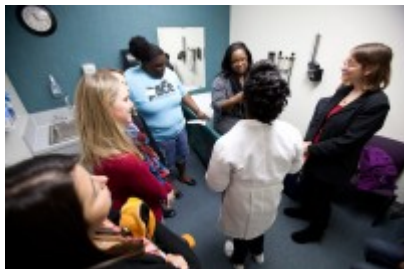
"We've been doing this field trip for years and the girls say that it changes their lives," said Emi Lenes, a counselor at PACE. "They realize that there are jobs in health care they've never even heard of that they can aspire to become one day."

This year, five fourth-year medical students, who are all members of the local [Chapman Chapter of the Gold Humanism Honor Society](#), organized the event.



Fourth-year medical student BriAnne McKeon talks with PACE Alachua student Brittany and teacher Allison Jones during a doctor-patient role-playing exercise at the UF College of Medicine. Photo by Maria Belen Farias

“I know how important it is in your teen and preteen years to have good role models and a supportive environment,” said medical student Sarah Yong. “It really impacts the choices you make.”



Brittany, a PACE Alachua student, gives a diagnosis to her teacher Allison Jones during a doctor-patient role-playing exercise at the UF College of Medicine. Fourth-year medical students (from left) Diana C. Narvaez, Paige Comstock and BriAnne McKeon look on with PACE Alachua student Bri, math tutor Debora Dumaine and counselor Emi Lenes. Photo by Maria Belen Farias

Diana Narvaez, another medical student and the event’s main organizer, said the project takes some work and organization, but it’s worth it to introduce the girls to new opportunities.

Lenes said many of the girls have been through a lot in their young lives and need support, encouragement and positive role models.

After touring the NICU, the PACE students also got a chance to delve into the world of patient simulation at the UF College of Medicine.

At the college’s Harrell Professional Development and Assessment Center, the teens listened to various heart sounds and got an overview of the cardiovascular system from Ira Gessner, M.D., a pediatric cardiologist and UF professor

emeritus of pediatrics. They also got to meet “Harvey,” a cardiology patient simulator that models cardiovascular abnormalities, and practice doctor-patient scenarios in the Harrell Center’s mock exam rooms.

The event ended with a panel featuring various health care professionals, who talked with the girls over lunch.

Lenes said she appreciated the time and energy UF and Shands students, faculty and staff gave year after year to PACE students.

“This field trip truly opens up the girls’ minds and hearts to possibilities that they would never have imagined existed for them,” she said.

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