



PHOTOS BY EMILY RASINSKI • ERASINSKI@POST-DISPATCH.COM

Jessica Mitchell (right) shows Alexis Fennoy how to put the ointment they made from zinc oxide and petroleum jelly into a container at the College of Pharmacy in St. Louis. The two Hazelwood Central High School students are participating in the BEST Summer Pharmacy Institute program.

## Summer program touts merits of pharmacy to eager students

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Terrence Harris, 17, listened when his stepfather advised him to choose a career that would land him a job no matter where he lived.

The Hazelwood Central senior, who excels in math and science, thought engineering was the answer.

But then he had a life-changing experience. Harris enrolled in a summer program aimed at boosting the pool of pharmacists by introducing high school students to the profession. The program, called BEST Summer Pharmacy Institute, was created by Barnes-Jewish Hospital, Express Scripts Inc. and The St. Louis College of Pharmacy. Students are chosen from a panel consisting of representatives from each organization.

So after being enrolled in BEST, would Harris rather be a pharmacist than an engineer?

"Oh yes, I can't wait," said Harris who now wants to specialize in oncology pharmacy, particularly in the pediatric or gerontology areas.

As Harris mixed zinc oxide powder into a paste used to protect babies' bottoms, he looked toward the future when he hopes to be involved with new drugs to help fight cancer.

"There will be a need for young pharmacists," he said.

Harris is one of the BEST program's 35 students from 13 area high schools. BEST was launched last year in response to the lack of pharmacists across the country. Although some pharmacists make six figure salaries, experts predict a shortfall of 157,000 positions by the year 2020, according to the Pharmacy Manpower Project, a nonprofit corporation serving the pharmacy profession.

The demand for pharmacists is fueled by an increasing volume of prescriptions



Kelly Keely of McCluer South High School creates an ointment in the lab. The pharmacy program also includes classes in algebra, trigonometry, English, pre-calculus and the Princeton Review.

associated with a rapidly aging population, increased direct marketing of drugs to consumers, and more pharmacies now staying open 24 hours a day.

"We all recognize we see a lack of pharmacists period. That's compounded by the fact that pharmacists tend to work where they train. So our intention was to create a local pipeline," said Steven Player, manager of the Barnes-Jewish pharmacy department, who helped develop the program.

In addition, program organizers want to help diversify the profession, which is predominately white, according to statistics from the American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education.

Many minorities are not exposed to the medical field in general, said Freddie Wills, director of diversity at the St. Louis College of Pharmacy. And when it

comes to being a pharmacist, some students don't realize that it takes at least six years of training after high school.

"You need to expose them early to the opportunities that pharmacy school offers," he said.

Under this year's BEST institute, students entering their junior year of high school enrolled for a four-week session and will earn a \$1,200 stipend if they complete the program. In addition to studying pharmacy, they are taking classes in algebra and trigonometry and the Princeton Review, which prepares them for taking college entrance exams.

Students entering their senior year are in a six-week program and will earn a \$1,400 stipend. They receive college credit for classes they take in English

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Program for youths touts the merits of being a pharmacist

composition and pre-calculus. They also study pharmacy and the Princeton Review.

Alexis Fennoy, 17, a senior at Hazelwood Central, said she's looking for a career with job opportunities and plans to become a pharmacist. Fennoy said she's enjoying the hands on experience she's getting in the St. Louis College of Pharmacy lab. However on Tuesday, she was a little doubtful about mixing the gooey petroleum jelly with the zinc oxide powder.

"It smells nice, like a baby," she said, "but I want to do real chemicals that you put in the body!"

Jessica Mitchell, 17, a senior at Hazelwood Central, said she likes the social side of pharmacy, being able to interact with patients and help them with their medications.

"It (BEST) changed my mind from not knowing what I wanted to do to knowing that I want to be a pharmacist," she said.