

PRINT-OSF STEAM program gives medical resident early inspiration and confidence

Gabe Koch (pronounced Cook), DO, a native of Tremont, Illinois, is a first-year Emergency Medicine resident at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria who says he's not sure why he felt drawn to a career in medicine. He wasn't particularly drawn to TV medical dramas and his only family connection is an uncle and two aunts who are nurses. But he thought it would be cool to take a class to become an emergency medical technician.

As a volunteer EMT in his hometown, Koch was exhilarated and felt a strong calling to emergency medicine. He then became an emergency department technician at OSF Saint Francis. After he initially failed to get into medical school, Koch decided he should enroll in an OSF STEAM course, Pre-Med Immersion.

OSF Pre-Med Immersion Experience is a two-week clinical program for college students who are interested in medical school. The program is offered by Jump Simulation which is part of OSF Innovation and is a collaboration with the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria (UICOMP). Students are exposed to a variety of roles in the clinical environment. Koch says the OSF STEAM course gave him invaluable experience and confidence in skills such as suturing, drawing blood and reading an electrocardiogram.

"I feel like the STEAM program really gave us bits and pieces to kind of start putting the broader picture together. And that was beneficial, because I think it gives you just a bit of a leg up. Even something as simple as reading an EKG – you're going to get exposure to EKGs in the STEAM course, that maybe your classmates in medical school weren't exposed to."

Koch says medical school is very competitive. He was among thousands of applicants for one of 110 seats at Western University of Health Sciences COMP-Northwest in Lebanon, Oregon. He was accepted after taking the Pre-Med Immersion course. Koch thinks the experience showed his commitment and perhaps gave him an advantage over other applicants.

"So I wanted that experience, and also wanted to show medical schools on my application, you know, 'Look, I'm taking initiative. I'm doing something extra here, because I am committed and really driven to succeed and get into medical school.'"

"These are my people"

The OSF STEAM course was a good start to creating a comfort level with the idea of working in a medical setting. Koch was exposed to the sights, sounds and smells that are unique to being in that atmosphere. It validated his career choice.

"These are my people. Health care is where I belong. The physicians and the other staff and the people that we got exposed to and got to meet. I think it was just a validation that, yes, this is what I want to do, and these are the people I want to call my colleagues."

He was also inspired by the physicians who seemed so passionate about what they do every day.

"There's a lot of things in the news about burnout, physician burnout, and it's inspiring to see there are still people who love what they do and have been doing it for years, and that it's not all doom and gloom. You can have a great career."

During his experience, Koch was exposed to surgery, the Anatomy Lab at Jump Simulation, and he heard from a neurosurgery resident who shared some hard truths.

"It wasn't all rainbows and lollipops. And we saw real life examples of that by that resident coming and speaking to us and saying, 'You know, very bluntly, like, it's hard. Residency is hard, medicine is hard. And so, you really have to be committed.' So that was, that was something that really stood out."

Koch appreciated the honesty, and it spurred him to want to push ahead with schooling to become a physician specializing in emergency medicine. But he says even if that wasn't the case, the experience is worthwhile for anyone exploring the idea of a medical career.

"You know, if I hate the STEAM course, then I'm going to change my biology major, and I'm not going to apply to medical school, right? If I love it, or if I'm equivocal about it, I'm going to investigate further. If I love it. I'm going to keep going full steam ahead to try to get into medical school."

OSF STEAM has been recognized by the Society for Simulation in Healthcare as an "Exemplar" for simulation programs world-wide. Participation was just the beginning for Koch who, after six months of his residency, already knows he's landed where he belongs. And that is the idea behind the OSF STEAM Pre-Med Immersion Experience — to expose pre-med students to the OSF, UICOMP facilities and instructors with an eye on recruiting them to study, and then live and work as medical providers in central Illinois.

Koch hopes to do that and to eventually give back by serving in the future as one of those passionate providers encouraging young people with an interest, that medicine can be a very rewarding career.