



# Case Study

## Hospital partners with local high schools to prepare students for health care professions

### Abstract

Since 2006, Box Butte General Hospital (BBGH) in Alliance, Neb., has fostered interest and recruitment in the health care profession through an innovative partnership with local high schools. Known as the Health Professions Club, the program began as a partnership between BBGH and Alliance High School, and today includes participation from two additional high schools in the area. The Health Professions Club aims to improve recruitment for the hospital by enabling students to gain exposure to multiple health care careers and make more informed decisions about their futures.

Membership in the Health Professions Club has grown by more than 50 percent since its inception, and several former club members are currently employed as health care professionals at BBGH.

The program consists of monthly learning opportunities, job shadow experiences and field trip visits to health care facilities. It is a successful community-hospital partnership that continues to evolve by implementing member feedback while ensuring the club remains structured and motivating.

### Opportunity

With a mission to lead and innovate in health care delivery and community wellness, the leaders at Box Butte General Hospital (BBGH) have long understood the importance of recruiting health professionals who are passionate about impacting the health of the Alliance, Neb., community. Knowing firsthand that recruiting health care employees to rural areas can be a challenge, in 2006 BBGH launched a unique program in partnership with Alliance High School.

Known as the Health Professions Club, the program is a strategic initiative that aligns with the hospital's mission of improving population health by addressing the ongoing shortage of trained health care professionals in Alliance and surrounding communities. The goal is to not only employ community members, but also to provide local high school students with hands-on health care experiences to help them make career-specific decisions about their education after graduation.

### Health Professions Club: A Success Story

Andy Leider, PT, DPT, is a former member of the Health Professions Club at Alliance High School. Today, he works as a physical therapist at BBGH and says the Health Professions Club was instrumental in helping him choose a career in rehabilitation therapy. Andy recently shared his thoughts about what the club meant for him:

*"As a high school student, my knowledge of the health care field was inadequate to make an informed decision on a future career. Through the Health Professions Club and summer internships affiliated with BBGH, I was able to get a much better understanding of multiple health care professions. This knowledge was valuable to me in selecting a career path because it gave me insider perspective of the roles of multiple departments, which helped my understanding of inter-professional interactions necessary to be an effective health care worker. This program also helped me establish relationships with the hospital that ultimately played a large role in returning to the community following my graduation."*

## Partnership Approach

The BBGH nursing administrative assistant, who acts as a liaison between the hospital and the school, coordinates club activities with assistance from a nurse educator. Together, they develop a year-long schedule of monthly topics for the club, and then solicit health care employees from different BBGH departments to volunteer as presenters on a topic.

While BBGH facilitates the educational components of the program, Alliance High School provides in-school resources for community service projects and transportation for field trips. Membership and program participation is free to the students in grades 9-12. The Health Professions Club comprises four educational components:

- **Monthly breakfast meetings:** Each month during the school year, the club holds a breakfast meeting to engage students with presentations and hands-on learning activities provided by BBGH staff and members of the community. Each presenter provides background information about his or her job in the health care field, including what it takes to be successful in that position. These monthly meetings offer real-life insights through small group discussions between students and health care professionals.
- **Job shadowing:** Students observe the day-to-day functions of various health care professionals by following BBGH employees as they perform their jobs in various departments. Job shadow opportunities allow students to meet the staff and gain exposure to the profession beyond what can be taught in a classroom.
- **Community service:** Club members are involved in various community service projects throughout the year (e.g., contributing to local food pantries and making food baskets for families in need during the holidays). The students develop leadership and organizational skills by leading these projects, asking for food donations, gathering information on families in need and preparing the baskets for delivery.
- **Field trips:** Offsite excursions to health care facilities are available for club members who meet the following requirements: attend at least half of the monthly meetings, participate in a community service project and complete a job shadow experience at BBGH. Over the years students have taken field trips to a variety of hospitals and institutions both in Nebraska and out of state.

## Results

From 2006 to 2017, membership in the program grew by 58 percent, from 31 members at one school to 49 members across three high schools. Currently, 10 former club members are employed at BBGH in such fields as nursing, radiology, laboratory services, patient finance, surgery and rehabilitation therapy.

Positive member feedback indicates that the students who participate gain knowledge and skills they can apply during their post-secondary education and beyond. There have been many instances where students have changed their career paths following a successful job shadow experience, which suggests the hands-on experience and real-world insight is valuable in helping teens and young adults chart the course to satisfying and rewarding health care careers.

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“My predecessor Dan Griess created this innovative program, and it has been an honor to continue his legacy in fostering student interest in the health care field. Through the Health Professions Club, we are touching the lives of students in ways that impact the health of families and individuals across our local community.”

– Lori Mazanec, ACHE  
CEO, Box Butte General Hospital

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## Lessons Learned

BBGH elicits feedback each year from current club members, which informs the program structure as it evolves over time. As a result, they have been able to identify two vital aspects of the club that provide the greatest impact.

**Facility time** – Exposure to the hospital setting at an early age has proven to greatly benefit the students, and BBGH is proactively looking for ways to incorporate more facility time in the program.

**School resources** – In addition to facility time, BBGH recognizes the need for a variety of school resources that enhance the hospital’s ability to provide structured education. For example:

- To facilitate community service as part of the club’s curriculum, the high schools provide materials to encourage food drive contributions from the students;
- To diversify student exposure to professional health care environments, the schools also provide transportation for field trips every year;
- To offer high school credit for the education students receive through the program, the club is now adjunct with the school’s Cadet program, which includes classroom study, assignments and a required Capstone presentation to hospital and school leadership.

## Community Partners

Box Butte General Hospital is a 25-bed critical access hospital based in Alliance, Neb. As a non-profit facility owned by Box Butte County, the hospital offers a 24/7 emergency department and a variety of inpatient and outpatient services to meet the health care needs of its community.

Alliance High School is a public high school (grades 9-12) in Alliance, Neb. Its mission is to ensure all students are given the opportunity to achieve academic success and co-curricular involvement by providing a challenging curriculum and a wide variety of learning experiences.

## About Bryan Health

Bryan Health is a Nebraska-governed, nonprofit health system that cares for patients, educates tomorrow’s health care providers, motivates our community with fitness and health programs, and collaborates to continually improve how we serve others.

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