

Learning Goes Both Ways: Mentor Discusses Welcoming Interns to Rush

By Shirley Ambutas, MSN, DNP

I love hosting interns. I find it's really a benefit. This summer, our team hosted two interns from Rush's [MedSTEM Pathways](#) program.

The program brings 180 hand-selected high school students to Rush University Medical Center and Rush Oak Park Hospital for six weeks of learning about health care careers and developing skills for succeeding in college.

This is our third year. We had Science and Math Excellence Network (SAME) interns in the last year of that program, and MedSTEM Pathways interns last summer in the first year of that program. Some of our interns have returned for more than one year, which is great. The returnees have skills, have gained some maturity and can help mentor the new group.

Rush interns learn many valuable lessons, some of which take place in classrooms, but a lot also happens in clinical and nonclinical department settings.

One of the most important lessons interns learns is how to multitask. That's really important. Also really important is the art of conversation and how to interact with people, which is key no matter what profession you ultimately decide on.

We ask all our patients what they want to accomplish here, and then write it on the whiteboard in their room. That's a great icebreaker for interns. We coach them to introduce themselves, explain that they're here for the summer and here to help with care, and ask the patient what matters most to them. They learn how to be creative in communicating with people who've lost speech after a stroke or who speak a different language.

You have to give them guidance, of course. We always have tasks for them, but we also have them do things they might not be comfortable with. That's how they grow and learn resilience. If I have a student who wants to be an internal medicine physician but isn't comfortable talking to people, she's going to have to learn that.

Interns also tackle other tasks that we really appreciate. We have a stash of clothing for people who need to use the gym but don't have exercise clothes. Interns help with organizing that. They run errands between departments, help put together flyers and other documents — whatever clerical help we need. And they are a big help with our Fun Fridays, especially when we get phone karaoke going in patients' rooms.

The exposure interns get is unparalleled. They get to see nurses at work, see doctors doing rounds, see physical therapists working with patients, and help with patients and animals when pet therapists come in.

All those interactions are helpful to get them thinking, "Do I want to be a therapist helping people get their muscles back — helping them learn to comb their hair and wash up again? Maybe I want to be a nurse who helps bring all the care together. Maybe I want to be a doctor." You can see them getting past what they see on medical TV shows and getting a more realistic view.

It's a mutually beneficial relationship. We also learn a great deal from our interns as well. We had a 20-year-old patient with a spinal cord injury who couldn't use his hands. He wanted to

listen to Pink Floyd. I'm not good at Spotify, so we had an intern help out. Did you know Spotify has voice activation?

I would encourage my Rush colleagues to get involved with the MedSTEM Pathways program. You can help in any of the following ways:

- **Host a job shadow** to give a student an up-close look at what your typical work day is like. Email nia_k_benton@rush.edu for more information.
- **Tell your story.** If you're willing to participate in a one-on-one interview with an intern about your job, email reach@rush.edu.
- **Speak to a class.** If you'd like to speak to a class of pre-interns or interns, email reach@rush.edu.

Shirley Ambutas, MSN, DNP, is a clinical nurse specialist at [Rush Rehabilitation](#).