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**EXCELA HEALTH GIVES HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
REALITY CHECKUP THROUGH HANDS-ON LEARNING**

GREENSBURG, PA, January 7, 2013... Andrea Redinger wants to inspire her students to consider medical careers - and the best way to do that is to make health professions real to them. Excela Health is helping this Greensburg Salem biology teacher turn her goal into reality.

Students in Redinger's BioTechnology class have studied with cardiologist Asghar Fakhri, MD; toured The Heart Center, and learned suturing techniques with general surgeon Richard Payha, MD.

Redinger, a St. Vincent College and Duquesne University alumna, has been enhancing the hands-on learning environment over the past several years, with special guests and field trips. The 18 students enrolled in this year's course will also witness an open heart surgery at Allegheny General Hospital, where Redinger worked as a researcher prior to returning to school for her master's in education.

"I didn't want the course to be reserved for advanced placement or honors students," noted Redinger. "While not everyone may become a doctor, there are many technical jobs in the clinical areas the students might be interested in. You know you've got their attention when they are willing to get up early and start the school day before their classmates. They are excited and inquisitive and eager to share what they've learned."

When Dr. Fakhri visited the class, he lectured on how the heart works and the various tests and procedures available to diagnose and treat heart disease. Westmoreland Hospital cardiovascular technologist Allison Vietmeier then coordinated a tour for the students through Nuclear, Echo and Interventional Cardiology (the Cath Lab), with assistance from Beth Dell, Ann Crissman and Heather Patton.

“I think it’s good for them to get in here and see these kinds of procedures and to know all the different fields available in health care now,” Vietmeier said.

Dr. Fakhri said he enjoyed his first experience being shadowed by the students and would participate again. “It’s important for people in my field to be involved in the community and to encourage youth,” Dr. Fakhri said. “These students see a stress test and learn about the type of information we gather.

“Mrs. Redinger taught them about the heart and they were able to ask very good questions. I think the students were very excited to get some experience about what they were learning in class and the real world,” he said.

Given the success of this collaboration, Redinger is eager to expand the relationship with Excela Health.

“I’m also learning so much doing this,” said Redinger. “Health care is a field that is constantly changing, and an expert is needed to provide the latest information.

“The students are coming in at 7 a.m., before school, on a voluntary basis, on their own time. It’s a big thing to get seniors out of bed that early,” she said of Dr. Payha’s class.

The surgeon checked students’ dissection work, which detailed the different systems of the body, and provided details on the similarities between the fetal pig and human bodies.

“The students are really good with suturing. For them to be so interested is gratifying,” said Dr. Payha, who also teaches at Seton Hill University and is a member of the Greensburg Salem School Board.

Dr. Payha stressed the realities of his career, from the intensive training required to how important it is to know each and every tool that can be needed for surgery.

Excela Health donated various suturing materials, clamps and curved needles as well as cardiac testing supplies no longer suitable for patient care to add to the real-life experience.