

Rural students have a closer look at careers in medicine

Annette Taylor

Seeing a group of school students intubating a "patient" successfully at the Waikato Clinical School recently was a good moment for health careers adviser Liz Carpenter.

"Practising on adult-sized mannequins, they used a laryngoscope to guide a tube down the trachea – and not the oesophagus. It's harder than it looks.

"They were thrilled when they did it correctly and the lungs on the mannequin puffed up."

As part of her work with the New Zealand Institute of Rural Health, Dr Carpenter organised a one-day event at the clinical school for year 13 students from the Waikato's rural areas.

"It's becoming increasingly difficult to find staff for health positions in these places. It's not just happening in New Zealand, this is an international problem.

"There is data to suggest someone brought up in a rural community is more likely to head back to the country after they've been trained, which is what we need," she says.

The 19 students spent the day trying their hands at a range of procedures, based in the school's Clinical Skills Centre on the Waikato Hospital campus. Split into groups of four, the students took blood and set up an intravenous line using very life-like plastic arms, with bulging veins, as well as intubating a mannequin.

"We also had them working on a piece of pork belly, which is a good stand-in for human tissue, removing a piece of skin and then suturing it closed. Finally, there was a scenario of someone collapsing and they had to perform CPR."

After all this hands-on activity, there was time to chat with senior medical students and house surgeons.

"One of the trainee interns had gone to school in Tokoroa, and another at

Hauraki Plains. They were thrilled to find students from their old stomping grounds.

The afternoon included a number of presentations, including the importance of hand hygiene in the hospital setting.

"Several of them used a UV-glow hand spray to test their hand washing technique.

"They listened to a talk from a GP who works in Tokoroa, and an anaesthetist talked them through the steps in an operation. Finally, they heard about pharmacy, as this is a career that they may not have considered but may be of interest."

It was, she says, a highly successful event.

"They made the most of the day, and I felt they very much enjoyed the chance to meet others from around the Waikato who are considering a career in medicine.

"Especially as those from rural areas are often the only student in their school with such plans."