

HEMATOLOGY

Learning about real life

By SUSAN AVERILL

Up to this point, it had been just play-acting on dummy arms and make-believe patients, but when a real boy walked in holding what looked like real gauze pressed tightly to one eye, it caused the girls to scurry up around him, like leaves in a gust of wind.

"Oh, boy, a real injury," one of them said in a voice tinged with excited anticipation.

Propelling him by the elbow, a white-clad instructor added more credibility to the scene in the medical assistant clinic at the Southwestern Oakland Vocational Education Center (SWOVEC).

One girl reached out with motherly concern and gently drew the boy's hair away from his eye, which had been splashed with bleach.

"SUE AND I will take care of it," said an authoritative voice, and the boy disappeared, having his injury cared for by the medical instructor and a student assistant.

Approximately 200 students from the Farmington area attend the center, which offers practical courses in 16 areas, including food preparation, medical assistant, dental assistant, architectural drafting, industrial design, floriculture and welding.

"We learn all about blood testing, blood typing, hemoglobin and cell counts," said Michelle Younger, a junior at Harrison High School. "I'm especially interested in hematology."

She looked over at a table occupied by a dummy arm made of rubber soft enough to resemble the human arm in texture.

"You should go over there and watch what they're doing," she said.

THE ARM contained plastic veins through which blood-colored water flow. Closer inspection revealed that the arm not only had actual fingerprints, but the last detail had been copied down to innumerable minute indentations where hair would grow on a normal arm.

It also had tracks for needle holes, peppering the inside of the elbow joint which had yellowed after a year's swabbing with alcohol.

Hair curtaining her face, one girl stood stiffly in front of it, holding a rather large needle in "ready" position. One deep breath later, the needle was imbedded in the rubber arm.

"Keep the needle steady keep

steady, hey, eye on the needle," coached Marti Garrels, medical instructor.

"Okay, now, as the needle fills, what are you going to do?"

Quickly, as an afterthought, the girl loosened the tourniquet around the arm while the red liquid surged into the syringe.

"BEAUTIFUL! Okay, keep the needle down, keep it pointed down," Mrs. Garrels said. A bit of the red stuff belched from the needle's end. "That's okay, just keep it down, that's good."

After two years of study, the girls in this course may be certified by the state to give injections, take blood and administer all types of first aid.

Taking their studies seriously, the girls practiced splint application. One enterprising student, after failing to find a willing victim, bound an arm and a finger of a one-legged skeleton in the corner of the room.

Free injection, vaccination and pre-kindergarten examination clinics are regularly held, with girls assisting nurses.

"We do practically everything except take blood from people," said Amy Prendergrass of North Farmington High School.

SWOVEC, WHICH opened four years ago in Walled Lake, has enjoyed an increase in enrollment while traditional high schools have foundered.

"A lot of people, including the kids come up and ask us what we're all about," said John Xenos, principal of the center.

"It's a very simple thing, we do not believe that high school students should graduate without a saleable skill."

He maintained that the student with such a skill will have the edge over one who has followed the traditional high school curriculum.

"Our kids are going to have some problems finding jobs, but we really feel sorry for those kids who don't have a saleable skill," he said.

Even if they decide that the skill is nice, but they don't want to be limited to just that, at least they'll have a toe-hold," he said.

"THEY MIGHT start out as an auto mechanic, and get interested enough to want to do more in that direction. Maybe they'll take a few classes in management and eventually have their own dealership."

Upon completion of the course, the students are usually granted a certificate. But it isn't a thing to be taken lightly. Xenos warned.

They must achieve a high level of competency and demonstrate a good employable attitude to receive the certificate. It's not just something they get because they've gone to class," he said.

The classes are offered in three sessions each day during the morning, afternoon and evening. The teachers are also professionals in their fields, people who have been where the kids want to go.

The center serves 13 high schools in seven districts, including Farmington, Novi, Walled Lake, West Bloomfield, South Lyon, Huron Valley and Clarkstonville.



Hmmm, excellent head bandaging... actually, it's not a bad turban either.



Marti Garrels, medical instructor, takes the time to go over every detail with care.



A splint can be made with a wood rod, as in the foreground, or with the more traditional wood splints on either side of a "broken" leg. (Photographed by Harry Mauthe)