



## Features

### **Students to graduate from Women in Medicine program**

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*By Valerie Schmalz*

Chika Chuku knew she wanted to be a pediatrician before she started high school, so Mercy San Francisco's "Women in Medicine" program was a perfect fit for her.

Chika is one of 13 young women who are the first class of graduates from "Women in Medicine" at Mercy SF, a partnership between Mercy High and St. Mary's Medical Center, a hospital founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1857. When the students graduate May 29, they will wear a plum-colored stole recognizing their participation. The partnership between Mercy High School and St. Mary's Medical Center was a brain wave of Mercy Principal Dorothy McCrea, and is designed to give students who are interested in a medical career exposure to medical professionals and a hospital setting prior to college. The four-year program includes visits to the hospital, presentations at the high school, and a junior year volunteering at St. Mary's.

"The program has been a wonderful addition to Mercy High School. It has provided Mercy students with an advanced academic curriculum and exposed them to various aspects of the health care profession which will be a great foundation as they enter higher education," said McCrea. "It's been a wonderful collaboration," said Mercy Sister Mary Kilgariff, St. Mary's Liaison for Community Health.

The students are issued their own lab coats and name tags, and take coffee breaks on every visit to the hospital, Sister Mary said. Some students even got an opportunity, just by chance, to play survivors in a disaster drill that coincided with their visit. "It was a great experience. They loved it," Sister Mary said.

The students said they appreciated the warmth and courtesy of St. Mary's, and it helped them decide if medicine was for them as well as teaching them about different opportunities.

Not all the students opted to pursue medicine. Chika, 17, plans to study biochemistry at UCLA before applying for medical school. But, Yvette Borja, 18, of Pacifica, is going to Yale University, with a full scholarship, as an English major.

Others changed gears, but maintained an interest in the medical field.

Rachelle Hidalgo thought she might want to become a medical investigator like the stars of her favorite show, “CSI”, so at her father’s urging, she signed up for the advanced academic program and four years of interaction with St. Mary’s Medical Center. Then, several members of her family became sick, and as she and her mom cared for them, Rachelle, 17, realized nursing was her real interest. Rachelle will begin attending the nursing program at the University of San Francisco in the fall. She’s already organized a blood drive at Mercy.

Jacqueline Lee, 17, plans to study bioengineering at UC Berkeley with an eye toward stem cell research.

Tiffany Hang, 17, is going to Seattle University to pursue an interest in forensic psychology after a senior project sparked her interest in psychology. “I don’t have to help in surgery but I can help them heal mentally,” Tiffany said. Monica Tabora has been accepted to the University of Hawaii and plans to major in psychiatry and Hawaiian studies. Other students have been accepted at University of Nevada-Reno and UC-Davis.

The experience of a Catholic hospital was positive, the students said, and Tiffany noted that St. Mary’s also helps poor and disadvantaged patients. “I really liked that St. Mary’s wasn’t just a hospital, it was a community,” and it took care of people who came to it from the community, Tiffany said.

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