Tania Ramos was wide-eyed as she walked the corridors of Cedars-Sinai Medical Center during a behind-the-scenes tour that was part of a recent Nursing Career Luncheon for high school students.

She was one of about eight students in the group. M. Carmen Adams, RN, of the OR/Anesthesia Department had their full attention as she led them through two surgical units. At one point, Adams asked the students to put on green scrubs over their clothes, as well as masks, so they could go into an operating room that was not being used. They were thrilled to enter a world they’d seen only on TV.

An ‘Awesome' Experience

Daniel Bachar, RN, a clinical nurse in orthopaedic surgery, walked in just after the students and was startled to find a group of teen-agers in the OR. He immediately shifted to teaching mode, answering questions about imaging and surgical equipment and telling the students: “This is a cool place to work. You learn something new every day.”

When it was time to move on, the students carefully folded their scrubs and kept them as souvenirs. “That was awesome,” said Ramos, who just graduated from nearby Hamilton High School. Ramos feels a special connection to Cedars-Sinai. She was born at this hospital and has long wanted to follow in the footsteps of an aunt who is a nurse at Cedars-Sinai.

The whole experience, which included a series of talks by nurses in the Harvey Morse Auditorium followed by lunch and the hospital tour, left Ramos feeling...
It takes a leap of imagination for boys and girls in their early teens to see themselves performing brain surgery. But the distance between fantasy and reality shrinks for the young people who visit Cedars-Sinai to experience “a day in the life” of a neurosurgeon during an event called Brainworks. Created by Cedars-Sinai neurosurgeon Keith Black, MD, in 1998, the annual event gives underrepresented 7th and 8th graders from Los Angeles area schools a first-hand look at what it’s like to be a neurosurgeon or a neuroscience researcher.

“Our goal is to fire a passion for science and medicine by giving students a chance to talk with surgeons, clinical scientists, nurses and physical therapists, and discover the excitement that comes from helping patients and solving medical problems through research,” said Black, who is chair of the Cedars-Sinai Department of Neurosurgery and director of the Maxine Dunitz Neurosurgical Institute, which sponsor the day-long event.

A Hands-on Experience

Brainworks features interactive stations where students perform virtual surgery using 3-D imaging and a phantom skull, manipulate actual surgical instruments, examine microscope slides of various types of tumors, perform laser and DNA experiments, have their vital signs checked, and learn how it feels to use a walker and other rehabilitation equipment.

Through this hands-on experience and interaction with healthcare professionals, Black hopes to cultivate the early curiosity and interest in medicine that he experienced with the encouragement of parents who were educators. He was just 17 when he published his first research paper and went on to author hundreds of scientific articles, including findings from pioneering research on how to open the blood-brain barrier and enable chemotherapy drugs to be delivered directly to brain tumors.
Nurse practitioner Sylvia Estrada, RN, is one of many Cedars-Sinai employees who speak Spanish, understand the health problems facing the underserved, uninsured Hispanic population of Los Angeles, and welcome every opportunity to help.

These employees are a crucial part of Cedars-Sinai’s community health programs, which deliver vital information and services to the city’s most vulnerable populations. One opportunity to reach those in the Hispanic community with limited access to health services was a recent day-long health fair organized by Telemundo 52, a Spanish-language television station.

The annual event drew 20,000 people to the Los Angeles Convention Center, and Patricia Buchanan of Telemundo estimated that about half of those who attended were uninsured.

**Health Education and Screening**

Cedars-Sinai’s team of 120 people provided free services for more than 3,000 people at the fair. Adults received blood pressure and diabetes education and screening, nutrition counseling, and H1N1 immunizations.

Cedars-Sinai also brought its two COACH for Kids and Their Families® medical vans, which regularly visit community sites in underserved areas of Los Angeles. In addition to providing H1N1 vaccines for children and adults, the COACH staff offered a variety of health education activities for children, including nutrition and dental education.

**Identifying Problems Early**

Estrada, a board member of the Los Angeles chapter of the National Association of Hispanic Nurses, recruited eight nurses from the association to join others on Cedars–Sinai’s team who are bilingual, ensuring that the many event participants who did not speak English would be able to communicate their health concerns.

“We see a lot of hypertension and uncontrolled diabetes in the large underserved and uninsured Hispanic population of Los Angeles,” Estrada said.

At the Telemundo health fair and many other similar events throughout the year, Cedars-Sinai’s team teaches people how to take better care of their health. “Our screenings identify problems before they get out of control, and we make referrals to help people get the follow-up care they need,” Estrada said.

**Teaming Up with Telemundo**

**HEALTH FAIR ADDRESSES NEEDS OF UNDERSERVED HISPANIC COMMUNITY**

Children brush up on their dental hygiene skills. Cedars-Sinai provided these props to help educate kids at a health fair organized by Telemundo 52.

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FOR FITNESS AND FRIENDS, CENTER STRUTTERS WALK 25,000 MILES A YEAR

At 88, Taye Torio is nearly always a few steps ahead of her peers.

A member of Cedars-Sinai’s Center Strutters walk for fitness program for the past 19 years, she is enjoying the benefits of a longtime habit of regular exercise.

She not only drives herself to the Beverly Center to walk laps around the mall three times a week with Center Strutters, but also works in her garden, does her own cooking and housework, and takes an art class. She wakes up feeling good nearly every day, and her blood pressure is normal.

"I'm pretty healthy and energetic. I can do just about everything, and I'm very thankful for that," Torio said.

There’s no doubt in her mind that Center Strutters has a lot to do with the spring in her step. The program involves about 300 people over the course of a year, with a core group of about 50 people, ages 60 to 90. They walk around the shopping mall between 8:30 a.m. and 10 a.m. every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

Beverly Center has been partnering with Cedars-Sinai to offer this fitness program for 20 years. Logan Williams, associate director of Community Health and Education, said the group, which includes many longtime members, puts in a total of nearly 25,000 miles a year.

"It’s not just the health benefits that motivate Torio and others to maintain their walking regimen. She explained: ‘I’ve made very good friends in this group. We look forward to getting together for coffee after we walk.’"