



# OPEN LETTER FROM AN ALUMNI MEMBER

Health Careers provided a look into medical professions like no other class or experience could.

Mr. Jim Bogan, Adm.  
Ms. Catherine Manderfield  
Portage Hospital  
Hancock, MI

Mr. Bogan and Ms. Manderfield,

I am John McRae, a former student of Houghton High School; I graduated in June of 2008. I am writing this letter because of the unique experiences and opportunities I have been fortunate enough to experience over the last year, as a member of the CCISD Health Careers class, and consequentially, as a member of Health Occupations Students of America. I am writing this letter for two purposes; as a thank you for the support of the Copper Country Intermediate School District, local sponsors, medical centers, teachers, aides and everyone who helped to support these great programs, and as an explanation and further evidences of why these programs and those who put time and effort into them should be continually supported and invested in.

Of all the classes I took in high school, Health Careers was by far my favorite. Health Careers provided a look into medical professions like no other class or experience could. Students were not only allowed to observe but also to actively participate in real hospital situations. This was done by placing students into small scale internships in local medical centers and hospitals. My particular internship was in the cardiopulmonary department at Portage Health. Through this internship I was able to see the inner workings of a hospital, the different professionals that work there, and how these professionals worked together to provide optimum patient care. Also, by shadowing respiratory therapists and other professionals in the cardiopulmonary department, I was able to learn many skills used in, and knowledge about, their profession. This knowledge and these experiences would be very useful when preparing for Health Occupations Students of America competition.

Health Occupations Students of America or HOSA is a national organization whose mission is to “promote career opportunities in health care and to enhance the delivery of quality health care to all people”. HOSA is woven into the curriculum for the Health Careers class; this association provides an excellent experience and learning opportunity for all students. This is because knowledge learned in class and internship can be directly applied to HOSA competitions allowing the students to demonstrate or display the knowledge they have learned over the year. There are a multitude of competitive events to choose from, this allows students to play to their strengths and choose an event specific to the internship they were taking. Competitors begin in regional competition, winners of regional competitions move on to state competition, winners of state move on to national competition.

I chose a competitive event called Clinical Specialty, for this event I had to choose a health profession and skill performed in that profession. I had to write a portfolio describing myself and the profession, and how I would fit into the profession. Finally, I had to choose a skill performed in that profession and demonstrate on camera the techniques and standards a fully certified professional would have to adhere to. Finally, during competition I was interviewed by medical professionals about my competency, understanding of my profession and the skill I performed, and my future in medicine.

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I chose Respiratory Therapy for my profession and an Electrocardiogram as my skill. I spent nearly two weeks creating my portfolio which consisted of 13 total pages written in a professional format, I read and reread this portfolio countless times, revising and re-revising. I also spent a lot of time creating the video; I learned how to perform Electrocardiograms as part of my internship. However, it took a lot of preparation to perfect my technique and the interactions with the patient during the procedure. Finally, I wrote a long list of questions possible in my interviews and practiced, in addition I had friends quiz me with questions so I could answer off the top of my head comfortably. I spent a ton of time preparing for competition, still in the end it was all worth it.

I placed first in the regional competition; this qualified me for state competition. At state competition I placed third, which qualified me for the national competition. Both regional and state competition was fun but neither could compare to the national competition. The National Leadership Conference was held in Dallas, Texas June 18-21, 2008. It was the experience of a lifetime. Over five thousand HOSA students attended the competition from all across the nation. Though a lot of time was spent with fun activities, the majority of the experience was working to prepare for my event or attending HOSA events held during the competition. I had already prepared my portfolio and video, so all I had to worry about was my interview. During state competition my interview had not gone that well or at least that's the way I perceived it later. However, my interview at nationals was the complete opposite; it couldn't have gone any better.

There was a full day between my interview and the announcement of the competitive event winners. Waiting was intense, still, the time seemed to fly by and soon I was at the ceremony announcing the winners of the national events. The top ten students from each event were called on stage, and then the top three places were announced. It took a good hour before my event was called on stage. Nine other people were called on stage for my event before I was; I was the last of the ten to go on stage. I didn't believe it was possible that I could have won first place. There were two Michigan competitors on stage. I remember for third place the announcer said "from Michigan" at which point my hopes had jumped, however, it was the other guy who had won it, next second place was announced. It came to first place; the announcer repeated "from Michigan" followed by my name at which point I experienced the biggest adrenaline rush of my life followed by receiving the gold medal in front of five thousand other competitors. I can safely say this was the best experience I had all throughout high school; it was worth every bit of effort.

Thanks to this entire experience, my time in Health Careers, at Portage Health, preparing for HOSA, all of it culminated in me making the decision not only to pursue a career in medicine, but to dive as deeply as possible into the profession and become a medical doctor. I am now a freshman at Michigan State University; I am in an advanced premedical program and currently have a 4.0 GPA. I hope to go to medical school at Case Western University in Cleveland, Ohio and to eventually become an oncologist. I can honestly say that it wasn't for health careers I wouldn't have chosen this profession. My experiences throughout this year cemented medicine as the only career field I can see myself in, and it's thanks to Health Careers, HOSA, and all the people that support it, that I was able to make this decision and commitment. I urge all of you to keep up this support because I am sure that there are others just like me who will appreciate and learn from this program as much as I did.

John McRae

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