

American Fork teen wins national medical competition



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Many people don't know how to spell pathophysiology, let alone win a national contest in the discipline. American Heritage School graduate Steven Duncan knows how to do both.

Pathophysiology is the study of diseases and disease processes, and Duncan is heavily involved in it -- so much so that he earned first place in a national contest. HOSA-Future Health Professionals held its championships in Orlando, Fla., and he was eligible to compete in two

categories. However, the rules only allowed him to participate in one, so he chose pathophysiology.

The eligibility was based on earning first place in state HOSA competition. Duncan also placed first in state in medical terminology.

"I took a chance, just because it was a less popular event," he said. He was pleased with the results and the whole experience.

"It was a dream," he said. "I was so fortunate. I got to hang out at Disney World and go and compete. I would bring my textbook and while I was waiting in line for the rides I would study."

In addition to attending American Heritage School, from which he graduated, he attended American Fork High School where he participated in HOSA, which was then known as Health Occupations Students of America.

"He is hardworking and very friendly," said Becky Bailey, his adviser. "He is a self starter and works very hard at his studies. One of his strengths is to get along with a variety of people. He is very relaxed in stressful situations and performs well under pressure, as is evident with him winning state in both medical terminology and pathophysiology. I was thrilled when he won nationals in pathophysiology, the harder of the two tests, especially because I view it as a reward for valiant effort and diligent studying."

"I like to study things," Duncan said. "I am kind of a nerd. I want to learn everything there is to know."

He became interested in medicine through personal experiences.

"I decided that I wanted to go into medicine after my dad had some health problems," he said. "I helped him when he was struggling with that. I got my CNA and worked at Bel Aire in American Fork. That was a good experience. I learned a lot."

When he discovered HOSA at school, he was excited.

"It was perfect for me," he said. "They had these events you could compete in that I was already learning about on my own. It was great."

He has plans to become a doctor.

"I am really interested in gastroenterology or endocrinology," he said. "I like all of them. I am just so interested in learning it all. Medical school will give me the chance to make a more informed decision. It is a lot of school, but I am on board." After college, medical school will be four years, followed by an internship, then a residency.

Duncan is finishing up his first year at BYU-Idaho and plans on serving an LDS mission, then finishing college and the rest of the regimen.

Bailey said she anticipates a bright career for him.

"He is going to be an amazing physician one day and I can't wait to see what he decides to practice," she said.

In the meantime, he is enjoying BYU-Idaho and will have an associate degree in science soon.

Not everything is work-related, however.

"I am getting involved," he said. "There are so many awesome opportunities. I go to comedy improv workshops. I love different things to do. I like to laugh. I go to creative writing workshops. I like being around other creative minds."

He also has a service-oriented side.

"I started volunteering at the Madison Memorial Hospital," he said. He is part of Team Madison, which operates a shuttle service to help drive people around, especially those getting out of surgery.

"I love meeting new people and having new experiences," he said. "College is everything I hoped and dreamed. It's great."

No matter what his other interests, medicine seems to be his focus.

"Medicine is important because its primary objective is to help people," he said. "If it didn't help people I probably wouldn't do it. Some of the hardest times that people have to do with those medical issues and health problems that are serious. I want to help people who are going through those because I relate to it. I can help people who are struggling because I have been there. I have had a taste of it. I was grateful for the hospital workers who held my hand and I wasn't even the patient."

He said with the aging of the population as baby boomers mature, there will be an even greater need for doctors.

"I want to jump on that bandwagon and help progress and get rid of these nasty things that people can come down with," he said.