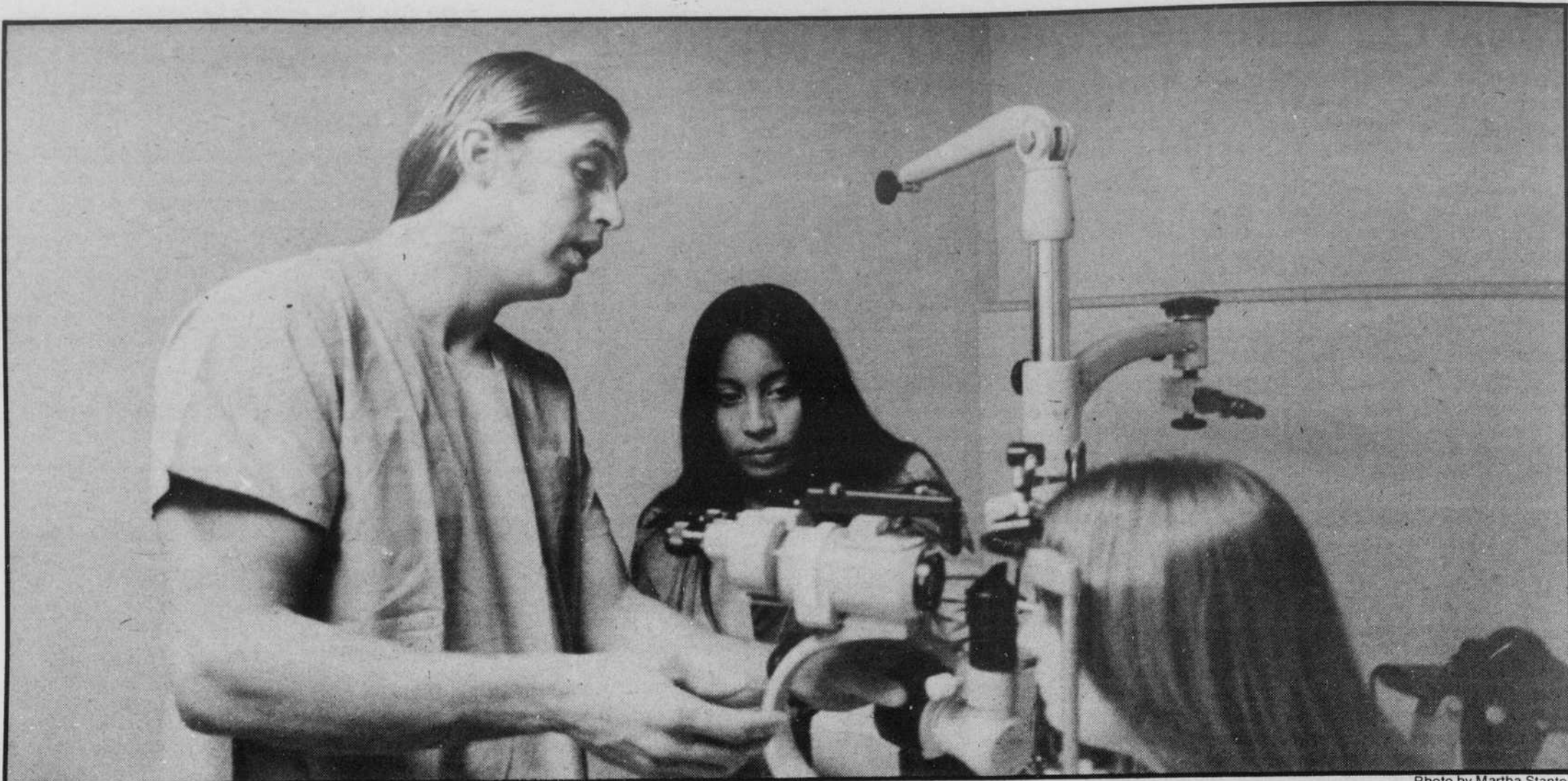




June Beltran, a pre-med student in the preceptorship program, gets a doctor's eye view from Thomas Gerow, a participating physician.

Photo by Martha Stanton

Hands-on program benefits pre-meds

By ALAN HARRIS
Of the Emerald

Since the establishment of the University Pre-medical Preceptorship Program in 1973, participants have experienced a 30 percent increase in acceptance to medical schools throughout the country.

According to Tim Hollen and June Beltran, student directors of the preceptorship, the program is "one of the most successful of its kind in the nation."

Exposure to the practice of medicine for many University pre-med students never extends beyond visits to their family physician; it's an opportunity usually enjoyed only by students attending medical school.

In an effort to afford students a more realistic view of medical practice, the Asklepiad Pre-Health Honor Society, with assistance from the Lane County Medical Society, established the pre-medical preceptorship program in 1973.

Actually, the first University pre-medical preceptorship was established by Dr. James Brook in 1933, according to Dr. Roger Mehl of the Eugene Hospital and Clinic.

Mehl said that as far as he knew, it was the first pre-medical preceptorship in the United States.

Mike Bray, a graduate of the University's pre-med program, saw the need to reinstitute the program in 1973. At that time, fewer than one third of University pre-med students were advancing to medical schools, Hollen said.

However, Hollen pointed out, the increase in applicants' acceptance to medical schools reflects the opportunity the preceptorship offers to pre-med students to "realistically assess their commitment to medicine."

This early opportunity is particularly helpful in light of the 10- to 14-year educational commitment a would-be doctor must make.

Specifically, the preceptorship operates on a rotating basis, allowing pre-med students to observe primary medical care and a number of special practices. Pre-med students arrange to work with physicians in four to eight blocks of time per week, for a month at a time.

Mehl feels the program is as important for the physicians as it is for the students. The physicians of the Eugene Hospital and Clinic, who together represent seven general fields and 42 sub-specialties of medicine, are strongly encouraged to participate, Mehl said, adding that approximately 29, or more than half, of the hospital's physicians participated in the preceptorship last year.

Physicians aren't exposed that much to pre-med students," Mehl said. "The questions asked of the physicians are as stimulating for them as for the students."

"The main goal is to reveal to the pre-med students that medicine is not all heroics," Mehl said. "There are many very mundane, day-to-day, repetitive procedures involved," he added.

Mehl noted that some people switch fields altogether after seeing the real world of a physician through the preceptorship program.

Hollen, a senior in pre-med and a paramedic at Sacred Heart Hospital's emergency ward, said, "Many people think doctors spend 15 minutes with a patient and then rake in all that money. That's not realistic at all. Medicine is not only a career — it's a lifelong commitment."

John Johnson, a fourth-year pre-med student, participated in a pediatrics preceptorship last spring. "You really get a chance to see what to expect," he said.

But Johnson also attests to the fact that some real-life lessons are a tough way to learn.

"One day a mother brought in her baby girl for an examination," Johnson said. "It was a really healthy baby. We examined her. The next week we found out she had died from crib death. That was really tough to handle," Johnson said. "The doctor really handled it well, but you know it hurt."

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