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NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Katie Emerson,
(909) 324-0345

Covina-Valley Unified Senior Puts Medical CTE Training to Use, Helps Save Life

COVINA, CA – When South Hills High School senior Sally Ortega came across an unconscious man in a parking lot, she did not hesitate to put her training into action. Joining a group of individuals taking turns giving the man chest compressions, Ortega helped keep the man stable until Emergency Medical Services arrived.

As a student in South Hills High's Patient Care career technical education (CTE) pathway, Ortega has gained various medical assisting skills, including learning how to take vital signs, recognizing signs of infection, assisting physicians with exams and minor surgical procedures, performing laboratory tests, and earning CPR certification.

"It was such a surreal experience," Ortega said. "I've been preparing for moments like this for three years in the CTE pathway, but you never really expect them to happen outside the classroom or workplace. When it does, the adrenaline takes over, and you focus on doing whatever it takes to save a life."

Ortega's passion for the medical field began at age 12 when she started caring for her diabetic grandfather by regularly taking his glucose levels. Ortega said that early experience gave her an appreciation for patient care and inspired her to pursue opportunities to further explore a career in medicine.

For the past year and a half, Ortega has volunteered at Kaiser Permanente, assisting patients and communicating with caregivers. As part of the South Hills Patient Care CTE pathway, Ortega will gain even more hands-on experience this spring when she begins an internship at a local clinic.

"Sally embodies the very best of what it means to be a Husky – dedicated, compassionate, and driven to make a difference," Principal Terry Abernathy said. "Her quick thinking and willingness to help someone in need is a testament to her character and the excellent preparation she has received in the Patient Care pathway."

Beyond her academic achievements, Ortega is the founding president of South Hills High's chapter of HOSA – Future Health Professionals, a global student organization that promotes leadership and career development in the medical field.

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Ortega helped establish the program at South Hills High this year, the first in the District, and will lead her peers in competitions and conferences in the coming months. In March, she and her team will travel to Sacramento to showcase various health projects, with the hope of qualifying for an international conference later this year.

After graduating, Ortega plans to attend a four-year university to join a pre-med track, with the ultimate goal of attending medical school and becoming a cardiothoracic surgeon.

“Experiences like this remind me why I want to pursue a career in medicine,” Ortega said. “Being able to help save a life is something I will carry with me forever, and it’s just the beginning of what I hope to accomplish in the future.”

This marks the second time in just two years that a South Hills High Patient Care pathway student has played a critical role in saving a life. During the 2023-24 school year, Patient Care pathway teacher Nikki Rodriguez-Ahern and now-graduate Karissa Ramos [stepped in to save a man’s life in the street](#), demonstrating the real-world impact of the program’s hands-on experience.

“Stories like these showcase the incredible value of our career technical education programs,” Superintendent Dr. Elizabeth Eminhizer said. “These opportunities provide students with practical skills and experiences that not only prepare them for successful careers, but also empower them to make a meaningful difference in their communities.”

PHOTO CAPTION:



CVUSD_SALLY: South Hills High School senior Sally Ortega identified the medical situation of cardiac arrest from the trainings of the Patient Care pathway in a real-world situation, helping to save a stranger on the street.

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