

# Future vets get a leg up

## R.L. Turner students learn real-life lessons at animal clinic

07:50 PM CST on Thursday, December 16, 2004

By **MARGARITA MARTIN-HIDALGO** / *The Dallas Morning News*

It might be gross anatomy for some, but to Jennifer Cook and Becca Wyatt, watching dogs and cats undergo surgery is what they've been wanting to do since they were kids.

Jennifer and Becca, both 16, are students in the Academy of BioMedical Professions at R.L. Turner High School. The two juniors, who aspire to be veterinarians, just finished getting hands-on experience at the Carrollton-based Veterinary Referral Center of North Texas.

The center on Trinity Mills Road has several specialty clinics to treat animal-related illnesses. Staff specialists include oncologists, dermatologists, and ophthalmologists who treat primarily dogs and cats.

The canine and feline patients come from cities around the state and other states, including Louisiana, New Mexico and as far away as Colorado. Many are treated for glaucoma, an eye-related condition caused by fluid pressure that could cause blindness; cataracts or ruptured discs.

For two days a week for six weeks, Jennifer and Becca were able to see the veterinarians at work. They observed surgeries and diagnostic sessions and watched as the animals received physical therapy.

They took notes on what they saw, and their notebooks have doodles of instruments the doctors used during the operations. Jennifer and Becca said that they asked questions to learn about the procedures and that doctors were always helpful.

Jennifer and Becca said they've always loved animals and have known they wanted to be veterinarians since they were in elementary school.

"I could never get bored being around them," said Becca, who has three pet cats.

Watching the doctors cut open the animals didn't faze Jennifer.

"I was too fascinated to be squeamish," said Jennifer, who has three dogs and two cats.

The students said the most exciting things they saw were the surgeries, especially one in which doctors affixed a plate to a dog's knee to help it heal from an injured ACL. The most difficult experience they had was watching doctors euthanize a dog that was seriously ill.

This was the first time the veterinary clinic has partnered with the Carrollton-Farmers Branch Independent School District to expose students to real-life animal medical care.

Students from the Dallas Independent School District will visit in the spring.

Jacque Tindel, director of R.L. Turner's biomedical academy, said the experience is invaluable for students – the exposure gives them more information. It also helps students realize whether that's the profession they want to pursue, Ms. Tindel said.

Dr. Joe M. King, a veterinarian who is the clinic administrator, said teaming up with the school helps students gain real-world experience to go with their classroom knowledge.

The girls said being exposed to real veterinary procedures was useful because they had a first-hand look at what they were learning in textbooks. Plus, they said it would aid in their college experience.

"We'll be more prepared for what we're going to see," Becca said.

E-mail [mmhidalgo@dallasnews.com](mailto:mmhidalgo@dallasnews.com)