



Providing Services to Business



Health Workforce Initiative

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HWI

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The current health care worker shortage has been well-documented, and the statistics are overwhelming. Over the next decade, an estimated 450,000 new health care workers will be needed in California, according to a recent study by the Public Policy Institute of California (September 2014).

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) is a partial, but significant reason for this increased need. Health Systems Innovation Network published a study in December 2015 which estimates that total employment growth due to the ACA would be 48,112 jobs in 2021, with the number of new jobs differing across occupations.

Health care organizations face many challenges as they work to meet this demand. Hiring additional employees is only one of them. Employers also need to ensure current staff have the necessary knowledge and skills to thrive in their roles and deliver high-quality patient care. Cross-training is becoming a necessity as job duties are expanded. In addition an increasing number of workers are encouraged to upskill in order to obtain specialty certifications.

All of these priorities fall under the umbrella of incumbent worker training, which can be a huge endeavor for busy hospitals and health care centers. As a statewide priority of the Health Workforce Initiative (HWI) of the California

Community Colleges, customized training programs are developed in collaboration with industry partners and delivered to health care workers across the state.

And training doesn't need to be costly or time-consuming.

"We can bring the training, at a more flexible schedule, a cheaper cost, and still maintain the quality," said John Cordova, HWI Deputy Sector Navigator for the South Central Coast region.

This effort not only helps individual workers achieve their professional goals, but it promotes a health care workforce trained to meet the future demands of a growing, aging, and diverse population.



Improving Patient Care

According to a recent study by the Public Policy Institute of California, there were an estimated 1.3 million health care workers in California as of 2012, with more than half classified as technicians or support staff, including medical assistants. In fact, more than 80,000 medical assistants are employed in California and the need for these support staff members is projected to increase rapidly in the coming years.

At first glance, these numbers may point to job security. However, the role of the medical assistant is expanding due to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), and not all medical assistants are ready.

When a group of medical assistants in Southern California were asked to reveal their workplace concerns, many reported that they struggle with a lack of knowledge to do the job effectively. Some felt that their role is often overlooked. Others described their difficulties communicating effectively with patients, and expressed the desire to spend more time with them.

These concerns did not go unnoticed. In fact, they paved the way for a career-transforming training program developed and delivered in San Diego County.

In order to prepare its medical assistants to provide safer and higher quality care under the patient-centered medical home model, North County Health Services and Family Health Centers of San Diego sought the collective expertise and assistance of the San Diego/Imperial HWI and UC San Diego Extension. Together, the partners developed a specialized medical assistant training program for incumbent workers designed to teach them higher level clinical skills, medical knowledge, and strong communication skills.



Initial funding was provided by the San Diego Workforce Partnership, followed by generous grants to support additional training awarded by The California Endowment.

A major focus of the training was to teach communication strategies that enable medical assistants to feel comfortable speaking with patients about difficult, but important topics. And since medical assistants are a part of a primary care team, it was also important to discuss ways to effectively communicate with providers and other staff members. The training hit the mark in both respects, as reported by employees who completed the course.

“I became a stronger person in the way that I’m no longer afraid to explain to patients what I have learned.”

“I feel I can talk with the provider and other staff members about problems in a much clearer way.”

Program completers also reported feeling more confident in the knowledge and skills they developed over the nine-week course. One participant mentioned that the course was more valuable than previous continuing education trainings, and all participants reported that their behavior on the job has positively changed as a result of the course. Equally important, patients are benefitting as the medical assistants apply their new skills on the job.

“I have been reminded how important customer service is.”

In an evaluative study of the training, providers, administrators, medical assistants, and other staff almost unanimously agreed that expanding the role of the medical assistant facilitated quality improvement, enhanced teamwork, improved work-flow, increased patient satisfaction, improved patient safety, and increased productivity of office visits.

Why Certify?

While ongoing professional development is a key to keeping medical assistants and other health care staff engaged in their work, the opportunity to advance also plays a role in job satisfaction. In a recent survey of health care workers, 51% of the respondents said that a lack of advancement opportunities posed a significant challenge in their current or previous positions.

Source: "Turnoverx: How to Cure the Retention Problems Ailing Your Health Care Organization." CareerBuilder. CareerBuilder. Web. 10 Oct. 2015.

For health care employees, obtaining specialized certifications is a ticket to career advancement and can lead to increased pay. A 2014 compensation report by the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) revealed that medical assistants holding a current CMA (AAMA) certification earn more than their non-credentialed counterparts.

Health care organizations have additional motivation to employ certified staff, as well. Recent changes in Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) reimbursement policies have caused an increase in demand for certified medical assistants.

The new rules stipulate that medical assistants must be certified in order for the health care center to be reimbursed for certain services.

These mandates create a particular challenge for facilities like Antelope Valley Community Clinic (AVCC), a Federally Qualified Health Center located in Los Angeles County. Medical assistants comprise 75% of the AVCC staff providing high-quality health care services to nearby residents, including medically underserved and low-income populations. In discussions with AVCC's management about their incumbent workforce needs, John Cordova learned that the majority of these medical assistants were not yet certified.

Sensing the extensive impact of the CMS reimbursement policies, HWI Sector Navigator Linda Zorn identified a statewide need for a medical assistant certification review program. Zorn quickly partnered with Ann Durham (Deputy Sector Navigator of the San Diego/Imperial region) and local staff to address the issue. Together, they developed a training course that would prepare medical assistants to take one of the certification exams recognized by the California Medical Board.

Armed with the newly-developed training program, Cordova partnered with AVCC to deliver the 40-hour



preparatory course. Classes were held onsite two nights a week, a convenient arrangement that allowed employees to work their scheduled shifts and take part in this career-building training. AVCC is planning to start three new cohorts, and management looks forward to increasing the number of certified medical assistants on staff by continuing to train their current incumbent workforce.

The medical assistant certification review course was also provided to Sutter-Gould by Valerie Fisher (Deputy Sector Navigator of the Central-Mother Lode region). This was at the employer's request in order to set minimum standard competencies for all medical assistant staff. The program was developed and delivered by Modesto Junior College one night a week over a nine week period, and included didactic and skills lab instruction and review. All participants were required to sit for a medical assistant certification examination and successfully pass in order to maintain employment and prevent layoffs.

Promoting student success is always a focus of HWI when designing a training program. Often, training participants have extensive job experience – sometimes



between 10 and 20 years. But having been out of school for some time leaves them a little rusty when it comes to taking tests.

To set these workers up for success, test-taking strategies are added to the curriculum. It's a simple inclusion, but can make all the difference for workers who must pass their certification tests in order to promote or perform certain functions of their jobs.

Cynthia Harrison and Barbara Gammon Brock (Deputy Sector Navigators in the Bay Area), Laurie Sienkiewicz (Deputy Sector Navigator in Orange County), and Trudy Old (Deputy Sector Navigator in the Far North region) also offer medical assistant certification review trainings in their respective regions.

Some organizations are pushing for an increased number of certified specialty nurses, as well. As reported in the Journal of Trauma Nursing (2015), obtaining specialty nursing certifications promotes quality patient care. These credentials also validate a nurse's knowledge and expertise, which can lead to career advancement opportunities and greater earning potential.



“These professional development opportunities for nurses not only allow them to obtain continuing education as required by their licensing agency, but those participants who pass the test may receive a raise and an opportunity to work in the specialty area,” said Old.

Specialty training for critical care nurses extends to Southern California as well. The Critical Care Specialty Nursing Program in Orange County is now in its tenth year and still going strong. The training is a partnership with local community hospitals that hire nurses to fill open positions in their critical care units. Over the course of nine weeks, these nurses complete the didactic portion of the training at Golden West College in Huntington Beach, and clinical internships at their worksites.

But what makes this program unique is the high-fidelity simulation experiences. Nurses attend to a human patient simulator that reacts physiologically through computer control by the instructor, and in response to interventions by the students. An increasing number of hospitals and nursing schools are utilizing this learning technique because it imitates the clinical environment, allowing for experiential training of clinical and decision making skills.

To date, 500 nurses have gone through the program and have participated in simulation scenarios that include Diabetic Ketoacidosis, Pulmonary Embolism, and other complex medical conditions.

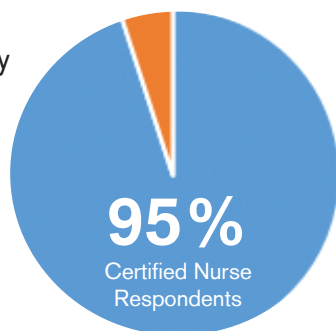


Effects of Specialty Nursing Certifications

Percentage of 40,426 surveyed certified nurses reported certification was linked to:

- Improved Patient Safety
- Improved Patient Care
- Higher Patient Satisfaction Ratings

Source: Wilkerson BL. Specialty nurse certification affects patient outcomes. *Plast Surg Nurs.* 2011;31(2):57-59.



In the Northern regions of the state, Trudy Old (Deputy Sector Navigator) facilitates specialty nursing certification review courses in collaboration with Enloe Medical Center in Chico. These courses cover a variety of specialties, including Medical-Surgical, Critical Care, Emergency, Inpatient Obstetrics, Orthopaedic, Pediatric, and Maternal/Low Risk Newborn. Since 2009, more than 1,000 nurses statewide have completed the certification review courses, qualifying them to take certification exams.

Customization is Key

While nurses and medical assistants make up a large portion of the health care workforce, incumbent worker training is also critical for other members of the team. Hospital partners regularly seek assistance from HWI Deputy Sector Navigators to develop training for staff as needs arise.

And there are no boilerplates here. The most effective training programs are designed to address the unique needs of each facility.

Shari Herzfeld, Deputy Sector Navigator of the Los Angeles region offers customized workshops in Customer Service and Generational Issues. She explains, "After receiving the request, I go back to administration and say, 'Let's dig into this issue and see whether it's a knowledge problem, disciplinary problem, or are there rewards for performance...let's look at the whole spectrum.' It's really important to find out the 'why'."

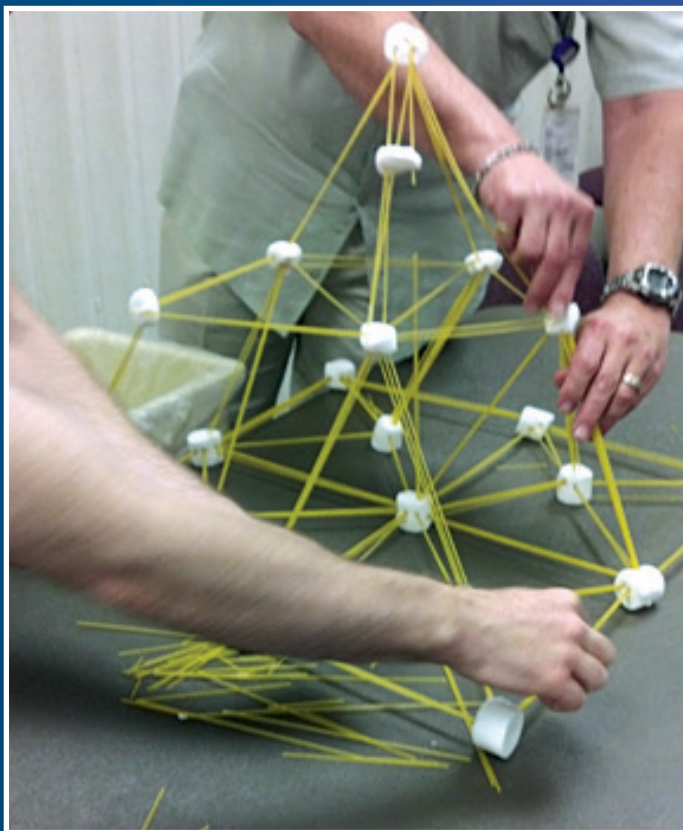


After in-depth assessments at each facility, Herzfeld customized modules from an award-winning customer service training program developed at Merced College and brought the curriculum onsite. Normally a multi-day training series, Herzfeld revised the presentations so that each session can stand alone. This way, attendees could benefit from a single day workshop, though most came to multiple sessions.

In some areas of the state, access to training services would be hard to come by without the HWI and its key partnerships.

One such region is rural Siskiyou County in Northern California, where Fairchild Medical Center maintains a state-of-the-art facility with a staff of more than 80 employees. In order to provide services that would allow Fairchild to maintain appropriate staffing, Trudy Old partnered with Contract Education at Butte College to come up with a customized solution.

The partnership arranged for contract trainers to travel from Chico to the Fairchild facility in Yreka two days a month for three consecutive months and provide leadership training to Fairchild's management staff. This training was delivered during working hours at no cost to the participants or facility as part of a pilot project.



Participants in a customer service training demonstrate teamwork as they tackle the spaghetti tower challenge.

Over the past two years, Herzfeld has delivered customized training designed to address all levels of staff at California Hospital Medical Center and Beverly Hospital in the Los Angeles area.





In Southern California, requests for customized training led to the development of a new program.

An increasing demand for cross-trained front and back office health care staff with information technology skills has spurred the creation of the Health Care Information Technology Statewide Workforce Training Model. This program addresses the need for frontline workers to expand their skill sets in order to meet new job performance criteria or move into specialized positions in this evolving field.

Beginning spring 2016, participants will take six courses to complete the short-term training certificate in “Health Care Information Technology” developed by the HWI and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) sectors in partnership with Santa Barbara City College, College of the Canyons, and Saddleback College. The short-term certificate includes courses that teach foundational software coding/programming skills as well as health care information technology, medical office practices, and terminology. Students will be offered a variety of content delivery methods, including online and hybrid options, designed to encourage course completion. This is a unique cross-sector, cross-regional partnership

with the ICT-DSN (Paula Hodge) and Health-DSN (John Cordova) at the College of the Canyons.

“This project and the work efforts behind it will add value to the industry. I’m appreciative to have been a part.”

Andrew Torres, RHIA, Director, Ambulatory H.I.M, Los Angeles and Orange County

“I feel the involvement of the Health IT industry in the Health Workforce Initiative curriculum development was necessary in order to make sure they both align. Currently, there is a large gap between the two. The Health IT field is no longer only medical coders: the demand is now for a team of project managers, trainers, directors etc. to successfully manage the powerful changes technology is bringing to healthcare. Health IT education must meet this demand.”

Aisha Noamani, MHIM, Director of Health IT, Community Clinic Association of Los Angeles County

A well-trained workforce is a must for health care organizations as they deal with the challenges that lie ahead. Staffing and scheduling conflicts need not be barriers to providing consistent, high-quality training for incumbent workers.

“That’s what everybody seems to find really compelling about what we offer,” says Ann Durham. “There are many ways to get it into their schedule, their system, and their organization.”

All of this incumbent worker training is part of the legislative intent of the Economic and Workforce Development Program of the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, providing business services.

To find out more about HWI incumbent worker training programs, contact Linda Zorn, Statewide Director/Sector Navigator at ZornLi@butte.edu.



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Linda L. Zorn, RD, MA
Statewide
530.879.9069
zornli@butte.edu

Visit HWI Website:
www.ca-hwi.org

Trudy Old
Northern Inland Region
Northern Coastal Region
T: 530.879.9049
E: oldtr@butte.edu

John Cordova, RN, BSN
South Central Region
T: 562.505-4409
E: john.cordova@canyons.edu

Sue Hussey, M.S., OT/L
Greater Sacramento Region
T: 916.650.2767
E: husseys@scc.losrios.edu

Shari Herzfeld, RN, MN
Los Angeles Region
T: 562.463.7004
E: sherzfeld@riohondo.edu

Cynthia Harrison, RN, MS
Mid-Peninsula Region
Silicon Valley Region
Santa Cruz/Monterey Region
North/East Bay
T: 408.855.5340 or 408.855.5215
E: cynthia.harrison@wvm.edu

Laurie Sienkiewicz, DNP, RN, ONC
Orange County Region
T: 714.895.8975
E: lsienkiewicz@gwc.cccd.edu

Valerie Fisher, RN, MA
Mother Lode Region
Central Valley Region
T: 559.737.6252
E: valerief@cos.edu

Avante E. Simmons, RD
Inland Empire/Desert Region
T: 760.636.7945
E: asimmons@collegeofthedesert.edu

Ann Durham, MSN, FNP, Esq.
San Diego/Imperial Region
T: 619.644.7057
E: ann.durham@gcccd.edu

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