



News Release

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New NMCC program in medical assisting approved by MCCS Trustees will help meet regional need

Aroostook County - Northern Maine Community College officials have been given final approval by the Maine Community College System Board of Trustees to begin offering an associate degree program in medical assisting beginning this coming fall.

The development of the two-year program is in direct response to the specific request of regional healthcare practices and professionals, who are looking to fill positions throughout Aroostook County in what is identified as one of the fastest growing professions by several key organizations, including the U.S. Department of Labor.

“Area hospital administrators, office managers, clinicians and physicians either came to the College individually or voiced the need through our advisory committees that they would benefit greatly by a program in medical assisting. These individuals indicated that the training for medical assistants in their facilities and offices varied greatly according to their own specific needs, but that many of the skills they were taking the time to train were uniform across all offices,” said Alan Panches, NMCC vice president and academic dean.

Medical assistants perform routine administrative and clinical tasks needed to keep the medical offices and clinics of physicians, podiatrists, chiropractors, and other medical professionals running smoothly and efficiently. Others in the profession may work in outpatient surgical centers, laboratories, or hospitals.

The services provided by medical assistants include both the office administrative and clinical aspects of their place of employment. Administrative duties include keeping patient records, managing financial matters, handling insurance arrangements, processing correspondence, and overall office management.

Clinically, the medical assistant prepares and assists in patient examination, records laboratory data, assists with office surgical procedures, performs basic physical assessment and measures vital signs.

“The duties of medical assistants vary from practice to practice, depending on size, location, and specialty. The common thread is that medical assistants perform both administrative and clinical duties,” said Daryl Boucher, the NMCC nursing and emergency medical services faculty member who worked collaboratively with his colleagues and healthcare professionals from throughout Aroostook County to develop the new program proposal approved by the MCCS Trustees at their January 24. “Most accredited programs in medical assisting are for a two-year duration, leading to an associate in applied science degree. Courses required for accreditation include anatomy and physiology, medical terminology, psychology, accounting, and business management.”

According to Boucher, many local employers who currently hire medical assistants are required to perform on-the-job training, but with recent changes in medical reimbursement, it is expected that an increasing number will prefer to hire graduates from formal post-secondary programs.

In developing the medical assisting program, NMCC followed the guidelines and standards delineated by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs. With final approval in place, College officials will now begin to pursue accreditation through CAAHEP.

As was the case with the program’s inception, a key component for the new program will be the continued collaboration with area partners in delivering the education. Several area medical practices and hospital departments have already been identified as sites for student clinical externship sites.

Students enrolled in the NMCC program will be involved in hands-on learning at a variety of sites with experienced medical assistants. Additionally, a list of key individuals has been selected to serve in an advisory capacity as development and implementation of the program progresses.

Susan Dugal of Limestone, who was most recently a health educator, staff developer and nursing leader at Cary Medical Center in Caribou, has been hired by NMCC as the program’s lead faculty member.

“There are several career advancement opportunities for medical assistants, with many certified individuals attaining management positions within medical offices or organizations. Additionally, some advance their skills and specialize their training to allow them to assist in outpatient endoscopy or surgery centers, or earn additional certifications in office radiography, ophthalmology, or dental health. Our program will reflect both the diverse duties our graduates will perform on the job daily, as well as introduce them to the many specialties areas their degree will open them up to,” said Dugal.

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