



# News Release

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## NMCC prepares to send first graduating class of medical assistants into County workforce

**Aroostook County** - A little over three years ago, officials with several healthcare provider organizations in Aroostook County approached Northern Maine Community College about offering a program to train medical assistants to fill positions throughout the region in what is identified as one of the fastest growing professions nationwide. In three weeks, Maine's northernmost community college will graduate its first class of medical assistants to help meet the regional need.

"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. I am so pleased that we have been able to respond to this need and that area healthcare providers will soon employ graduates of our medical assisting associate degree program," said Alan Punches, NMCC vice president and academic dean.

To mark the occasion, NMCC will hold a pinning ceremony for its five inaugural medical assisting program graduates on Thursday, May 14, at 2:00 p.m. in the Edmunds Conference Center. The event will highlight both the accomplishments of the students and the efforts, over the past three years, to get the program started.

"I am exceptionally proud of what we have been able to accomplish together to deliver a top quality medical assisting program that serves a vital need in our community," said Susan Dugal, program coordinator. "The students have worked so hard to achieve their goals and have stayed focused. We've all learned and grown so much over the past two years."

In addition to the work of the students and her faculty colleagues in the nursing and allied health department at NMCC, Dugal is quick to acknowledge the guidance and support of the two dozen area health care practitioners and providers, many of whom had encouraged the College to launch the new program and who now serve on the medical assisting advisory committee. A number of the individuals have also opened up their medical practices and facilities as sites for student clinical and hands-on training.

Medical assisting students comprising the first graduating class are: Katelyn Crane of New Limerick, Clarissa Gallagher of Castle Hill, Pamela Gorneault of Stockholm, Tate Macpherson of Presque Isle, and Sandra Pictou of Mapleton. Three of the five students who will graduate in the coming month have already accepted employment offers from area medical practices.

“It has been a journey and it is great to be part of the first medical assisting class from NMCC to go out and put our degree to work. We are setting the example and we know that we take away from this experience the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed,” said Crane, who will speak on behalf of her classmates at the May 14 ceremony.

The medical assisting program is showing signs of growth. There are currently 11 students completing their first year of studies, and according to Dugal numbers for next fall’s entering class currently stand at a dozen confirmed students, with a number more expressing interest.

With the first class of students about to graduate, College officials now have the green light to begin the formal accreditation process for the program. In developing the curriculum, NMCC followed the guidelines and standards delineated by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs, which is the review body to which NMCC will submit its information.

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.

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*The first students to complete the Medical Assisting Program at Northern Maine Community College will earn their associate degree on May 16 and enter the local workforce. Members of the class of 2009 are (left to right) Pamela Gorneault of Stockholm, Katelyn Crane of New Limerick, Clarissa Gallagher of Castle Hill and Tate MacPherson of Presque Isle, along with instructor Susan Dugal, who serves as program coordinator. Missing from photo is student Sandra Pictou of Mapleton.*