

The Republican. PLUS

MASS LIVE
HOLYOKE

Colleges prove power of TWO

When Holyoke Medical Center and Western Mass. Physician Associates needed help enhancing the skills of their medical assistants, they partnered with Training & Workforce Options (TWO).

TWO developed a curriculum and taught a 10-week class to 15 medical assistants from Western Mass. Physicians Associates. The training was designed to prepare the workers for a national credentialing exam. The TWO course at Holyoke Community College was a hybrid of classroom work and online learning taught by a medical assistant.

An additional 25 medical assistants from Holyoke Medical Center Specialty Practices enrolled in a second round of training.

TWO, a collaboration between HCC and Springfield Technical Community College, is designed to deliver high-quality, custom training solutions to the business community to boost bottom line performance and productivity.

"At TWO, we provide training for a range of businesses throughout the region," said Sharon Grundel, director of corporate training: healthcare, nonprofits and government services. "To keep pace with new technologies in the workplace, employers realize that they must invest in skills-training to retain good workers, especially in a strong economy."

Grundel describes the training TWO provided to the healthcare workforce as "up-skilling."

"Up-skilling is any education, training or development program that pre-



Wilmaury Burgos, a medical assistant with Western Mass Physician Associates, participates in TWO training.

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Sharon Grundel, Training & Workforce Options (TWO)

pares employees with the knowledge and skills needed to advance their careers," Grundel said. "And companies realize that when they invest in employees, retention improves, and that is good for the bottom line."

Up-skilling – a smaller investment than hiring and training a new worker – serves to create a more well-rounded, cross-trained workforce, Grundel explained.

"Investing in employees is good for business in multiple ways, especially at the entry and direct-care level," she said. "It helps boost morale. Employees who have training and develop-

ment opportunities are happier in their roles and have a bright outlook on their future with the company. And that means increased customer satisfaction. When employees are happier with their company and believe in what they are working toward, they do better work."

Holyoke Medical Center and Western Mass Physician Associates – both members of Valley Health Systems – teamed up with TWO to "up-skill" the medical assistants who are a critical part of their workforce, Grundel said.

Medical assistants perform a wide

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Medical assistants from Western Mass Physician Associates received training from TWO. Top row, from left, are Sophie Pise, Kate Winslow, Zuleka Otero, Meghan Lapiere, Kelly Galindez, Kayla Cronkright, Diane Hernandez, Lillian Colon, Barbara Ortiz and Kristin Morin. Bottom row, from left, are Wilmaury Burgos, Brenda Santiago, Natalie Sanchez-Rodriguez, Lydia Mazza and Ruth Ayala.

TWO

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array of clinical and administrative duties that require a range of technical, clinical and administrative skills. Some medical assistants learn through their years of working on the job, while others are formally educated.

As healthcare becomes more technically advanced, medical assistants are facing more federal regulations to work in the field. It is becoming more difficult for members of this profession to secure employment without credentialing.

With assistance from TWO, Western Mass Physician Associates received grant funding from the Workforce Training Fund (workforcetrainingfund.org) to provide this training opportunity to 15 medical assistants in preparation for a national credentialing exam. TWO later facilitated another round of training for 25 medical assistants from Holyoke Medical Center Specialty Practices.

In addition to classroom learning, Holyoke Medical Center and Western Mass Physician Associates developed and staffed a full-scale "Skills Day" for all trainees. The session included 10 hands-on stations covering clinical and administrative tasks such as checking vital signs, administering injections and medication, taking EKG

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measurements, among other competency tests.

"Medical assistants are the indispensable backbone of a provider office. The review course collaboration between Training & Workforce Options and HMC Specialty Medical Offices and Western Mass Physician Associates prepares medical assistants to pass a credentialing exam that will showcase their professionalism and high level of competency," said Kristin Morin, a registered nurse who serves as quality manager for Holyoke Medical Center Specialty Practices and Western Mass Physician Associates. "We are very proud of this exceptional program that supports our continued commitment to healthcare staff education and to providing the best medical care the valley has to offer."

For more information about how your business may qualify for grant funds and the benefits of working with TWO, contact Grundel by email to SAGrundel@stcc.edu or call 413-755-4396.