

Health Center Partnerships to Meet Emerging Staffing Needs Including the Modification of the CUNY Medical Assistance Curriculum

Background:

The Institute for Family Health employs close to 1,000 employees of which 400 of them work in our 29 practices and are considered our frontline support staff. They provide assistance with the registration, management of the electronic medical records, nursing assistance support to our providers, patient billing and accounts, managing the call center services and patient relations. It is not without saying that they are a vital part of patient care delivery and patient satisfaction.

While the current economic struggles facing the nation has impacted on each of us in some form or fashion, the evolutions in healthcare continues to challenge us to look for ways to improve service, manage grown or downsizing and to manage our labor force.

This is a story of a perfect marriage –

Outline of Project:

As an outgrowth of our efforts to improve our patient delivery experience and outcomes, we are now designing the physical space of our practices to eliminate the waiting rooms and merging the front office stations with the first point of care services. These changes mean that our frontline support staffs that are currently functioning separately will have to be retrained and Human Resources will have to find a solution to the ongoing recruitment needs that these changes will present if we are to be successful.

The Project:

In our search we quickly learned that the vendors that we approached to assist us could not provide us with a curriculum that realistically reflected the skills and knowledge of the environment of care required. We also learned quickly that The Institute for Family health was not alone in this challenge but other healthcare organizations were also struggling even in these high unemployment times to find qualified staff.

Through CHANYS and NYACH interventions, the CUNY system was brought into an open conversation with a group of healthcare leaders to discuss the challenges facing filling jobs because of the lack of qualified workforce. It was quickly recognized that this partnership collaboration would yield the solutions everyone was looking for, the front-end delivery of educating the workforce and the back-end payoff, the employer hiring the workforce.

Because of the high demand of the Medical Assistant role in community healthcare, the committee began its first project of looking at the current CHUNY Certified Medical Assistant program and what may have been lacking as it relates to the skills required for hiring and sustaining employment.

Highlights of the Process:

1. Each of us discussed our current staffing models & what we look for regarding skills.
2. The challenges of finding experienced MAs and the struggles of new graduate's transition.
3. Identifying the core skills required and building from there.
4. Understanding and creating a curriculum that is not just the clinical patient care mechanics but the laws and ethical knowledge and how to teach good patient customer service as well.
5. Finally, a curriculum that also incorporates the importance of job readiness and transition to the world of work as it relate to the environment you will be facing that you must be able to navigate if you are to be successful.

OUTCOME:

1. Curriculum is completed and ready for full implementation.
2. We have been able to move forward with our efforts of upgrading our staff for our re-organization. This will not only increase our patient services but will save our staff from being displaced.
3. We have held a number of information sessions with our staff and have started with identifying staff who are interested in the transition.
4. We have secured funding to assist us with the transition where it will not cost our employees any out of pocket expenses.
5. We have already solidified the new salary for the upgraded staff which will happen at the completion of the program.
6. Lastly, we have been part of a perfect marriage that will continue to yield a pool of workforce candidates that will sustained our growth and stabilized labor force.