

 [Print](#) |  [Close Window](#)



THE ENQUIRER

Last Updated: 7:27 am | Tuesday, January 16, 2007

Gateway training medical assistants

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

Recent years have seen a shortage of nurses in hospitals throughout the country. Now there's a need for more medical assistants. Gateway Community and Technical College hopes to help meet this demand.

Medical assistants are not nurses. Their role is to perform administrative and clinical tasks at the offices of health practitioners.

"The general public - and even a lot of medical people - do not realize what medical assistants are and how multi-skilled they are," said Jacqueline Freeman, an assistant professor at Gateway, which trains medical assistants.

Chris Damon, executive director of the American Medical Technologists, a Chicago-based nonprofit membership association that represents about 21,000 medical assistants, sees the profession growing with the rest of the medical industry.

"Medical assistants are in high demand as workers and are likely to remain so for the foreseeable future," Damon said.

"Therefore, medical assistants have greater opportunities in the marketplace than other workers, may be able to have some choice among positions and will know that any period of unemployment will likely be relatively short due to the ongoing demand for medical assistants," he said.

Damon also points out that a shortage of medical assistants is developing.

"The field is expected to grow much faster than average, which means an increase of 36 percent or more during the decade 2000 to 2010," Damon said.

This is partly because of the increased demand for medical services by an aging population. It also is because lower insurance company reimbursement and Medicare cutbacks have put a financial squeeze on medical practices, Damon said. Physicians' offices try to make up for this by hiring fewer nurses and more medical assistants.

The median salary is \$23,000. Freeman says that draws motivated students.

"The program generally attracts the right type of people because they realize they will not make the salary nurses make and therefore they are not choosing it for the money," Freeman said.

At 45, Brenda Rose was returning to school after years away from the classroom. She chose medical assisting because she could graduate in two years. As a mother and active churchgoer, the profession would allow her to be home regularly for her kids and in church Sunday and Wednesday evenings.

"There are so many opportunities, so many different avenues to explore in medical assisting from family practice to specialties such as orthopedics, gynecology, holistic medicine, heart specialist, and you can work in the hospital emergency room and other hospital areas," Rose said. "The possibilities and needs are unlimited."