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Students learn weight loss one step at a time

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

The students in assistant professor Jacqueline Freeman's Introduction to Medical Assisting class thought that they were putting on weight, so they decided to get healthy - not only for themselves but for their future patients.

The students, who attend Gateway Community and Technical College, researched three areas: diet, exercise and fitness.

Freeman thought it was especially beneficial to her students because of the work they will be doing. Medical assistants are often confused with nurses in doctors' offices.

"They are the patient educators - it was a joint project that benefited them but also was a learning experience," Freeman said.

As part of the program, the students obtained pedometers and tracked the number of steps they took each day.

"My goal was to walk 10,000 steps on Mondays and Wednesdays," said Tammy Jett, 47, of Alexandria. "I thought it was exciting to exceed my goals, which in turn made me want to walk more. I have continued to walk 30 minutes twice a week."

Student Brenda Rose, 45, of Dry Ridge, came up with the idea and approached Freeman about it.

"My goal was to get to 8,000 steps a day, which I reached," she said. "I lost a couple of pounds in the process. I will be able to educate patients on the benefits of walking even just a little."

Erin Adams, 24, of Dayton, was in charge of organizing incentives for the group.

"My personal goal was not set at losing pounds, but was actually set at healthier steps," she said. "My personal goal was to take at least 10,000 steps a day, and - hooray - I did it."

"This project was definitely in tune with the profession I chose," Adams said. "The program showed skill, communication, hard work and just an overall positive attitude toward a healthier lifestyle. I'm sure that I will see many cases of creating a healthier lifestyle for patients, so I am very excited about that."

Additional education - and some small incentives - were provided by Megan Cermak of the North Central Area Health Education Center.

"I taught the medical assistant students about healthy weight-loss programs, how to incorporate activity into weight loss and how to choose a personal trainer and a gym," she said. "I think that information is especially appropriate for medical assistants, because they will be in a position to teach and encourage others to lose weight."

While the students learned a lot through their hands-on experience, Freeman thinks that one of the things they'll learn is empathy for their patients. "The

biggest lesson we probably knew is that you start off with aspirations, and you end up finding it's a little more difficult than you expect," she said.

But taking it one step at a time, her students got healthy.

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