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Community Health Centers: Workforce Innovators



COMMUNITY
HEALTH NETWORK
OF WASHINGTON

Washington
Association of
COMMUNITY
& MIGRANT
HEALTH
CENTERS

Washington's community health centers (CHCs) are using innovative workforce training programs to help address the challenge of recruiting and retaining health care professionals at all levels. Without adequate staff, CHCs would be unable to satisfy their mission of providing health services to the underserved, uninsured, and individuals in public programs. To address this need, many CHCs have implemented programs to provide educational opportunities for current staff or on-site training programs for potential staff. The following are just a few examples of many innovative workforce programs undertaken by Washington CHCs.

Medical Assistant Training Program

The Washington Association of Community and Migrant Health Centers (WACMHC) is currently piloting a Medical Assistant (MA) apprenticeship training program with seven CHCs. The first trainees begin the year-long program in February 2014. The program was approved and initially funded by The Washington Department of Labor and Industries in order to increase the number of MAs trained at CHCs, with a focus on patient centered medical home concepts. It has also been approved by the Washington State Department of Health. Trainees include new MA students with at least a high school diploma and an ability to communicate in English, or current registered MAs who wish to reach the highest level of certification (MA-Certified). MAs can achieve full certification by completing an approved college or apprenticeship program and then passing a national exam. During the program, trainees are mentored by an on-site MA-Certified or Registered Nurse, and complete 2,000 hours of on-the-job training and two online courses. MA trainees receive a partial salary based on number of hours completed, with full salary upon completion of the program and the MA-Certified exam.

Clinical-Based Family Medicine Residency Programs

Family medicine residency programs are integral to giving family medicine residents exposure to, and experience working with, CHCs. Below are a few of the programs that have been effective in recruiting and retaining residents in this important and rewarding career path.

- For 20 years, the Community Health of Central Washington/Central Washington Family Medicine Residency Program has been serving central Washington. The program has graduated 106 family physicians—one-third of whom now serve the greater Yakima area and provide care to underserved populations. Through a provision of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the program recently expanded from training six residents per year to ten, including a rural satellite program at their Ellensburg clinic site.
- In June 2013, the Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinic started the Sollus Northwest Family Medicine Residency Program, starting with two residents. Two more residents will be added in both 2014 and 2015. This osteopathic training program is the first in the lower Yakima Valley and is based at Yakima Valley Farm Workers' clinic site in Grandview. Hospital rotations are performed at nearby PMH Medical Center in Prosser and Trios Health (formerly Kennewick General Hospital). Funded by the ACA, the residency program is sponsored by OPTI (Osteopathic Postdoctoral Training Institute)-West, headquartered in Pomona, California, and is affiliated with Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences in Yakima.

- In July 2013, through a partnership with AT Stills University in Arizona and the Wright Center for Graduate Medical Education in Pennsylvania, HealthPoint started its Family Medicine Residency Program. In its first year, this osteopathic training program has four residents who treat patients at HealthPoint clinics in Auburn, in addition to HealthPoint patients admitted to Auburn General Hospital. This program is also funded by the ACA.
- Each year, the Swedish Family Medicine Residency Program places six residents in three Seattle CHCs—Carolyn Downs Family Health Center (a site of Country Doctor Community Health Centers), Sea Mar, and Seattle Indian Health Board. The program was founded in 1974 and the CHC partnership began in 1988, with Sea Mar. These placements train family physicians to practice in underserved urban and rural areas.

Medical School Training in Local Communities

HealthPoint is one of eleven nation-wide “community campuses” of the AT Stills University School of Osteopathic Medicine in Arizona, an innovative medical school that emphasizes community-based service as an essential element of learning. The program emphasizes community-based recruitment, with a particular focus on students from the communities they served. Four other CHCs provide rotation experiences for HealthPoint’s students, thus expanding their learning experiences while maintaining a focus on developing physicians dedicated to working in primary care for the underserved. In addition to the HealthPoint community campus, the Northwest Regional Primary Care Association has a learning classroom in Portland, Oregon, and places students in CHCs throughout the Pacific Northwest, including Moses Lake Community Health Center.

Dental Residency Program for Underserved Communities

Established in 2006, the Northwest Dental Residency Program is a one-year program that provides dentists experience working in CHCs. Based at the Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinic, the program serves as an umbrella for training in Eastern Washington. The program provides residents with the necessary clinical experiences that will enable them to offer comprehensive dental care to underserved and low-income residents in communities across the state. A number of special patient groups are served by the program, including immune-compromised, special needs and geriatric patients. Following graduation, 70% of graduates have remained working in Washington’s underserved areas, including 40% within CHCs.