

Priority Healthcare Occupations and Career Pathway Development

Prepared by the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County on behalf of the Healthcare Workforce Partnership of Western MA
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State of the Industry in Western Massachusetts

Current federal and state healthcare reform efforts are focused on improving the quality of patient care, reducing costs and improving overall population health. These efforts impact all aspects of the healthcare industry in western MA, creating a changing landscape that makes future workforce planning challenging. Some significant examples of industry change include:

- New technology and the implementation of electronic medical records
- Focus on care coordination and collaboration across care settings
- Focus on prevention and aging-in-place
- Move away from hospital-based care

While the changing landscape has caused some “right sizing” among employers, the healthcare industry continues hiring at a faster pace than any other regional sector. In addition, the industry is preparing for the development of new occupations, identifying training requirements for incumbent workers and establishing career pathways leading to high demand occupations. All of these conditions make the mission of the Healthcare Workforce Partnership of Western MA relevant: Building a skilled workforce to deliver quality patient care.

Priority Occupations

The following occupations have been identified by employers for future research and career pathway development because there is a gap between supply and demand or the occupational requirements are changing rapidly. The partnership’s allied health committee and the Western MA Nursing Collaborative have reviewed these occupations and while the list still needs to be validated by additional employers, there is general agreement with the occupations selected. Moving forward, the partnership will engage in a career pathway development process that involves employers, educators and the workforce development system. The steps involved in the career development process include:

1. Engage employers to improve understanding of priority occupations and define common career pathway elements
2. Clarify all partner roles and responsibilities in designing and implementing career pathways
3. Create career pathway road map for each priority occupation, including required education and credentials
4. Redesign education programs to provide a clear sequence of education courses and credentials that meet the skill needs of targeted occupations

Occupation	Rationale for Prioritization	Actions
Medical Coders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New ICD-10 coding language will roll out in 2014 which impacts new and incumbent workers • Critical occupation for employers since they are directly tied to receiving correct reimbursements for services • Articulated career pathway needed with other occupations such as medical secretary and medical billing • Specialty coding training needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March meeting focus • Regional validation with employers • OJTs available through Healthcare OJT program

Occupation	Rationale for Prioritization	Actions
Community health workers/patient navigators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evolving role due to changing healthcare model and focus on wellness • Employers use different models • Statewide training and certification requirements underway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May/June meeting focus • UMass Public Health Training Center conducting regional needs assessment • OJTs available through Healthcare OJT program
Entry-level Direct Care Workers: home health aides, certified nurse assistants, patient care technicians and personal care attendants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large number of new positions in the region • Current training programs do not produce workforce to meet changing demands of healthcare • Common competencies required among all direct care workers • Low retention rates for some employers • Large number of WIA/DTA customers select direct care training without understanding the work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review results of Franklin Co. & Hampden Co. Bridging Healthcare Skills Gap grant • Link with state’s Personal and Home Care Aide State Training Grant Program (PHCAST)
Medical Assistants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard certification needs to be addressed by employers and training programs • Community college programs not flexible so many enter into proprietary programs where quality can be poor • Expansion of role in medical home model • Need for simulation to be included in programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OJTs available through Healthcare OJT program • Review results of Hampden Co. Bridging Healthcare Skills Gap grant
Physical Therapists/PT Assistants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PTs are persistently in demand in many care settings • Career pathway development needs to be better understood by partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional research needed
Mid-Levels: physician assistant, nurse practitioner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High demand occupations due to changing healthcare model and the delivery of primary care • Difficult for employers to hire new grads without “residency” programs in place. Residency programs would provide structured transition to practice model (Note: The new OJT program does not cover mid-levels) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link to new IOM report on the Future of Nursing and strategies for NPs • Additional research needed
Medical Lab Technicians/ Technologists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evolving role • Aging workforce although future demand unclear • No regional programs exist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional research needed
Registered Nurses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entry into practice moving towards bachelor’s degree • Creating a seamless progression model is a regional and statewide priority • RNs play critical role in new ACO model, efforts to reduce unavoidable hospital readmissions and improving care transitions from one setting to another • IOM report stresses importance of RNs practicing to the full extent of their license, taking on leadership roles and lifelong learning • New nurses not prepared to practice in settings with jobs and need on-the-job training (e.g., home care, primary care, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western MA Nursing Collaborative ongoing focus • Partners Investing in Nursing grant focus on care transitions • OJTs available for unemployed RNs