

## Hospitals and Healthcare Facilities Work to Stay on Top!

By Dr. Peter Mora, President, Atlantic Cape Community College

*Healthcare employment is one of the leading employment sectors in New Jersey.* Overall employment is up 24 percent for the last decade, with hospitals showing a 5 percent increase. Given its strategic importance for the economic vitality of the state, retaining a well-trained workforce becomes critical. While the healthcare debate is raging across the country, the pressure on hospital and healthcare providers in New Jersey to have their staff trained to perform at their best every day has never been greater. New computerized record keeping and inventory systems demand that all staff be well versed in computer technology, regardless of their title. Scoring high marks on customer satisfaction surveys, like Press Ganey, can mean the difference between maintaining certification, with the strong market share that follows, or empty beds and loss of funding. Having a well thought-out professional development training plan is the best way to address these goals. A number of hospitals and healthcare providers across the state have turned to the New Jersey Business & Industry Association's Basic Skills Training grant program to help them fulfill these staff training needs.

The NJBIA Basic Skills Training program, funded this year with a \$1-million grant from the NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development, was established three years ago to help upgrade the basic skills of workers across the state. The training is provided free of charge. The grant is centrally managed by the New Jersey Community College Consortium with classes delivered locally by the community college in the county where the business is located.

Staff training targets many critical areas. Improved communication between staff "is key to keeping patients safe," states Donna Gurdgiel, MSN organizational development specialist at Shore Memorial Hospital in Somers Point. Training delivered by Atlantic Cape Community College focused on improving communication between doctors, nurses and their patients. Staff report that improvements have spilled over to their personal lives as well.

Other hospitals have placed their emphasis on improving employees' technical skills. Computers are an everyday sight in all hospitals today. They are used to track patient interactions, manage inventory and supplies, chart staff schedules and more. Fox Rehabilitation, a multifaceted rehab center in Cherry Hill, worked with Camden County College to deliver a series of classes to make these tasks much easier. Jaime Bellace MPT, Fox's Qualifications Specialist, says that the program has "cultivated a highly-skilled workforce" and "has enabled us to invest in our staff." Bellace was impressed that staff across the organization - from entry level to executives - were able to learn and develop new skills because of the customization that the grant can bring to each class.

The Valley Hospital, located in Ridgewood, has been participating in the program since its inception in 2007. Dennis Cronin, director of education, who praised the overall quality of the training, is quick to point out that the computer classes delivered by Bergen Community College "were a good investment," allowing the hospital to help employees build their skills in areas that were "important to the hospital."

For more information about the Basic Skills Workforce Training Program, contact Bob Rosa, COO with the Community College Consortium, at 609-393-9000.



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