In 2014, the Washington Association of Community and Migrant Health Centers (WACMHC) launched an apprenticeship program for Medical Assistants, followed by the launch of a similar apprenticeship for Dental Assistants in 2016. Both programs are registered apprenticeship through the WA State Department of Labor and Industries, and are some of the first successful healthcare apprenticeship programs in the U.S.

Participants in the MA apprenticeship work for 12 months as paid, full time employees in a healthcare setting with the one-on-one guidance and coaching of an experienced MA, progressively gaining skills and responsibilities. The program also requires 364 hours of supplemental unpaid coursework, both online and through a series of in-person weekend lab days with an expert instructor. The curriculum is unique in that not only provides instruction on the technical skills necessary to become an MA, but also provides instruction and on-the-job training for the MA role as part of a care team based on the patient-centered medical home (PCMH) model. Upon completion of the program, the apprentice is eligible to take the Certified Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA) exam through the National Healthcareer Association, and to obtain their Washington State MA-Certified (MA-C) credential.

To date, the MA apprenticeship program has started 7 cohorts, enrolling a total of 132 students and 25 employers across Washington State. The retention rate for apprentices in the program is 98%. Of the 74 students who have completed the program and tested to date, the overall pass/certification rate is 89%. The first-time pass rate on the CCMA exam is 82%, compared to the national average of 73% in 2016. 97% of apprentices who completed the program have remained with the employer where they completed their apprenticeship.

The Dental Assistant apprenticeship just launched its first pilot cohort of 7 apprentices and 4 employers in November 2016. The structure is similar to the MA program—12 months of full-time work with an experienced DA coach, plus 464 hours of supplemental online coursework and lab days with an expert instructor. Program graduates will have the option to continue on to receive their Dental Assisting National Boards (DANB) Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) credential.

Although the program was initially intended to meet the staffing needs of WACMHC’s member organizations—the federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) of Washington—the program is also open to other employers that share WACMHC’s mission of providing healthcare to underserved populations. The development of the apprenticeship model in the healthcare field is a promising method to recruit and train a diverse workforce, both overcoming barriers to traditional education and meeting the growing demand for a well-trained frontline healthcare staff.

For more information, visit www.wacmhc.org or contact:

Aubre Lawless
Training and Education Manager
360-786-9722 x222 | alawless@wacmhc.org

Katherine Lechner
Workforce Development and Education Manager
360-786-9722 x239 | klechner@wacmhc.org