

Health tech grant to help train medical assistants

Students enrolled in health science programs at Holyoke Community College will benefit from a \$230,068 state grant for the purchase of telehealth equipment and other cutting-edge medical training technology at the college's Center for Health Education and Simulation.

HCC will use some of those funds,

awarded through the state Executive Office of Education's Skills Capital Grants program, to buy autoclaves, microscopes, vital signs monitors, IV simulators, sutures, dressing materials and other items that will allow the college to enhance and expand its medical

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Holyoke Community College nursing instructor Kara Moriarty works with a student nurse in the HCC Center for Health Education and Simulation.

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assistant program.

"The demand is growing," said Clare Lamontagne, HCC's dean of health sciences. "If you look on employment sites, they're all hiring medical assistants. We would conceivably like to double our enrollment."

Students who complete HCC's one-year medical assistant certificate program are then eligible to take the national certification exam, which, if passed, qualifies them to work in doctor's offices, hospitals, and clinics or for other healthcare organizations.

The majority of the grant, about \$141,000, will be used to purchase three state-of-the-art medical simulators — a birthing simulator, pediatric simulator and tracheostomy simulator. Simulators are programmable, high-tech mannequins that students in health science programs, such as nursing, can examine, talk to and treat as if they were real-life patients.

The new birthing simulator, "Victoria," will join an older model HCC purchased several years ago, called "Noelle," in the simulation center's maternity suite.

"One of the things these simulators provide is the opportunity for students to be exposed to patients experiencing high-risk, low-occurrence types of medical situations, like significant complications in labor," said Lamontagne. "The technology changes quickly. The material of the new simulator makes it more lifelike, and that adds to the fidelity of the experience."

The third big chunk of the grant will be applied toward the purchase of tele-

health equipment. Telehealth is expanding area of healthcare that allows for remote consultations and treatment. The device HCC is buying is a computer on a cart that has videoconferencing capabilities and medical assessment instruments attached, such as a stethoscope, otoscope and ophthalmoscope.

"It's a really great infusion of dollars to help support our students as we move into all these different learning modalities," said Lamontagne. "We're really cutting-edge to have this telehealth equipment."

Lamontagne said the telehealth equipment will also enable HCC to offer collaborative teaching exercises and expand its partnerships with other area colleges, such as Bay Path University.

"We've been working with their PA (physician assistant) students on simulation," said Lamontagne, "and they are eager to work with us on the telehealth equipment."

The Skills Capital Grants are awarded by Gov. Charlie Baker's Workforce Skills Cabinet to educational institutions that demonstrate partnerships with local businesses, as well as align curriculum and credentials with industry demand in order to maximize hiring opportunities in each region of the state.

"It is encouraging to see schools that are awarded Skills Capital Grants put the funds toward career pathways to give Massachusetts students experience and expertise in industries that are expanding in the commonwealth," Baker said in announcing the grants. "These beneficial programs will give thousands of students a head-start on prosperous careers and we look forward to seeing their progress."