

# LMC adds med assistant program

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**BENTON HARBOR** — Lake Michigan College has added a one-year medical assistant program of study to provide an alternative career path for students.

Students will learn skills that make it possible to get better-paying jobs in the health care industry, Leslie Kellogg, LMC's director of career education and work force development, told trustees Tuesday.

"We have a lot of students, for example, who want to be nursing students, but we don't have many seats in the nursing program," Kellogg said. "This is a one-year program, and it gives another option for working in health care. There are jobs."

Kellogg's comments followed Tuesday's LMC board meeting. The new program will be offered at MTEC starting Jan. 13, with an initial enrollment of about 20 to 25 students. That figure will double when a second class starts next fall.

Board members agreed to move ahead with the program, following a presentation from Kellogg, Debbie Gillespie, LMC's director of work force training, and LaToya Williams, director of the Healthcare Education Institute.

Trustee Judy Truesdell summed up the board's reaction by saying, "This is such an exciting move for all of us — it's great, it's all good."

Medical assistants typically handle the "front of house" function at a doctor's office, where they can perform basic clinical procedures, like blood draws, Kellogg said.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics anticipates a 14 percent growth in the field by 2020, with an estimated mean annual wage of \$30,550 nationally, and \$28,410 in Michigan.

Tuesday's decision follows

a year of conversations that Kellogg and LMC President Bob Harrison had with employers such as InterCare Community Health Network, and Lakeland Health-Care.

"That was one of the needs that really bubbled up: 'We really need more medical assistants.' Some of the smaller employers also indicated, 'We'd like to have medical assistants.' So that was a catalyst," Kellogg said.

Students will go through the new program together, and depending on the type of final assessment that they take, become a certified or registered medical assistants, Kellogg said.

However, there's no major difference between the titles, other than the type of test that students take, she said.

The medical assistant program is the first new one to be developed through the Healthcare Education Institute, which the college created this fall.

The institute is intended to bring noncredit and traditional credit programs under one roof, Kellogg said.

Noncredit programs include nurse's aide, pharmacy tech, phlebotomy — which also starts in January — and patient registrar. The traditional credit side is represented by the emergency medical technician, medical assistant and paramedic programs.

Plans include a medical coding program, which will go into the traditional credit side, Kellogg said.

"People who go through these non-credit programs can get credit for entry-level courses in the credit programs," Kellogg said. "We've tried to build (the HEI) so that you can enter at different points, and move up as you go — but still have a credential that gets you a job, while you work toward a credential that gets you a better job. That's the whole concept."