

The Health Care Workforce Transformation Fund supports training programs that address workforce skill needs identified by health care providers as they work to improve patient care and reduce costs. Commonwealth Corporation administers this fund on behalf of the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development.

Berkshire Medical Center (BMC) is a community hospital in Pittsfield, MA, offering a full continuum of medical specialties. A teaching hospital and part of Berkshire Health Systems, BMC is one of the largest employers in the region.



Workforce Challenge:

Like most health care providers, BMC is experiencing a rise in the number of patients with complex health issues. This requires nurses and other frontline staff to deliver more coordinated, efficient, and advanced care. In an effort to address this issue and allow the RNs to provide advanced care, it is important to enhance the role of the nursing assistants (CNA). This requires not only clinical skill development, but also improved communication and teamwork skills. Left unmet, these workforce issues can lead to turnover, compromised quality of care, inefficiencies, and increased wait time for procedures.

“ The Nursing Assistant II Career Ladder course has enhanced the nursing assistants’ ability to provide more advanced patient care and increased their self- image. We see an increased skill level, both in current and new skills learned. More important than that however, is the improved ability of the nursing assistants to both identify potential patient problems and to communicate their findings more effectively to appropriate staff. The CNAII staff now display a better understanding of the processes and physiologic changes the patient is experiencing thus improving the ability to consider all components of care. In addition, we now have a group of nursing assistants who can mentor others.”

-Elizabeth Kirby RN, M.Ed. , Director of Education,
Berkshire Health Systems

Training Strategy and Expected Outcomes:

BMC designed a two-pronged workforce training strategy. The first component is a comprehensive training program teaching critical clinical skills and soft skills such as communication, problem solving and time management, allowing RNs to delegate more complex tasks to CNAs and empowering them to better support the nursing team. The second component of the strategy includes a mentoring program, by which more experienced CNAs will mentor and support novice CNAs as they develop strong skills and work habits.

Over the two years of grant activities, they have seen improvements in communication, teamwork, critical thinking and the ability to set priorities. The 41 trained CNAs that moved onto CNAII roles reported and showed increased confidence in skills, an ability to perform advanced tasks (e.g. taking out saline wells and disconnecting Foley Catheters), as well as effectiveness on the job. That led to a significant increase in delegation from the RNs to the CNAIIs, which resulted in improvements in the discharge process. Reports showed that RNs working with CNAIIs were able to discharge 30.1% of their patients on time (compared to 19.3% at the beginning on the grant) . In addition, with earlier discharges the hospital will see savings in areas such as food service, housekeeping, overtime costs, as well as a potential increase in the number of patients that can be admitted sooner as beds are available at earlier times.