

LWTC to offer new health care degree programs

by Deborah Stone
Staff Writer

The Allied Health field has been expanding rapidly over the past several years and colleges and institutions have been scrambling to meet the needs of the profession.

"You could say it's really booming," comments Paul Root, Dean of Health Care Programs at Lake Washington Technical College. "The field is changing to be more community and outpatient oriented, with more services offered outside of the hospital. It used to be that you could only get these services in the hospital and had to stay there for much longer periods of time post-surgery. Now, however, hospital stays are shorter, as patients can get follow-up care in the community. But, it's created a real demand for trained professionals."

To help meet this demand, LWTC has designed several new programs aimed at giving students specialized professional health care skills in the areas of massage therapy and physical and occupational therapy.

This fall, the college will offer a one-year Certificate of Proficiency program in spa massage and a two-year Associate of Applied Science degree program, specializing in medical massage.

"It's a ladder program," explains Root, "so that it builds on skills and also allows students to get a certificate and then come back later to get a degree. The medical massage model has advantages in that it gives students the ability to work within the medical realm, with doctors and other health-care providers."

The two-year physical therapist assistant and occupational therapy assistant programs will begin in 2009

and will also lead to Associate of Applied Science degrees.

"There is such a shortage of PT and OT assistants right now," adds Root. "And there are just not enough programs around to fulfill the needs of those students who want to pursue careers in these professions."

With these three new programs, LWTC will have a total of seven health care degree programs.

The college's other two-year courses are in nursing, dental hygiene, dental assistant and medical assisting.

Also on tap for the coming year is a Funeral Services degree program. The two-year course will prepare students for employment as a funeral service director or professional embalmer. It will provide them with the skills needed to start a flexible, well-paying career in the growing field of funeral services.

Career options include working for a small family business, a multi-location company or starting one's own business.

"The program will be the only kind of its type in the state," comments Root, "and one of only a few on the West Coast. It will be a combination of theory and lab experience, offering students every phase of funeral service, including restoration, cremation and the art and science of embalming."

He continues to explain that those admitted to the program

will learn how to work sensitively and professionally with bereaved families. And they will gain necessary information related to the social, legal, psychological, religious and public health issues that are associated with death.

Thirty students will be accepted each fall for the full-time course and already there have been numerous inquiries from prospective enrollees.

"All of these new programs provide opportunities for entry level workers to gain the skills and training they need to succeed in the health care field," says Root. "These skills will keep them in constant demand and insure their employability in the years to come."

To handle the influx of students who will be involved in these new programs, LWTC is constructing a new 71,000 square-foot facility that will house all of its health care classes.

Due to be completed in the winter of 2011, the building will allow the Allied Health department to expand its offerings and create state-of-the-art labs dedicated to the programs.

"We desperately need the space because we're very cramped right now and classes are held all over the place. We're really looking forward to having the new building and everyone here is very excited."