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Ventura County hospitals partner with CSUCI to train workforce

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By **Greg Barnes and Dawn Neuman**

Ever think about what happens to blood samples drawn during a hospital stay or doctor’s visit? They are delivered to a certified laboratory to be analyzed by a clinical laboratory scientist, who provides critical information for making health care decisions — like discovering warning signs of cancer, heart disease, diabetes or blood clots.

As medicine becomes more complex, the growing need for CLS expertise is outpacing the supply. Yet until now, Ventura County did not have certified CLS training laboratories where post-baccalaureate students could complete the mandatory one-year, full-time internships needed to qualify for the CLS certification exam. Local CLS candidates had to travel to one of 10 CLS-certified locations across California — the closest being in Los Angeles.

That’s about to change. Although the health care industry is highly competitive, four hospitals — Los Robles Hospital and Medical Center, Community Memorial Hospital, Ventura County Medical Center and Simi Valley Hospital — have partnered with CSU Channel Islands to create an industry-approved CLS field experience internship program right here in Ventura County. The first 10 internships began in September.

The catalyst for this unusual spirit of competitor cooperation was a shared commitment to providing quality patient care at a reasonable business cost. The shortage of local talent to fill critical health care jobs had resulted in regional wage competition, talent cherry-picking, over-extended employees working multiple shifts at different facilities, and costly registry and other fees for out-of-area talent. The hospitals agreed that building a local talent pool would be more cost effective than the current system — and benefit the regional economy.

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education are committed to building a skilled, local health care workforce.

Once the hospitals were committed, hospital staff and administration worked together to develop a robust field experience program where interns could learn at multiple hospital sites. CSUCI took the lead as project liaison with the state and as coordinator to compile the reams of required paperwork — a daunting process with numerous certification agencies involved.

After four years of hard work, the internship program is now in place — ensuring that local hospitals have ready access to a skilled local CLS workforce. Students working on CLS certification won't have to travel outside the county to train and, with an average salary of about \$80,000, they will earn wages that will enable them to live where they work.

What is unique about this initiative is that four hospitals collaborated with a public university to create and invest in a local post-graduate program that will grow a future workforce, give students the opportunity for learning experiences in different hospitals, and enable future employers and future employees to become acquainted prior to hire.

If competing hospitals can work together to benefit customers, workers and employers in the Ventura County region, can competitors in other industries do the same? The answer is yes. We just need to think creatively and act collaboratively to fill high-demand job openings with skilled local talent.

Ventura County is fortunate in that it has universities and community colleges eager to partner with businesses to help their students succeed. We need to work as one (business, education, labor, economic development, government and community organizations) to identify and build on the opportunities that we have before us.

Employers who want to see how collaborative educational strategies can strengthen workforce skills in their industries are welcome to participate in meetings of the WDB industry sector committees: business services, clean/green, healthcare and manufacturing.

Check the website for meeting dates and times: www.workforceventuracounty.org.

• *Workforce Development Board of Ventura County member Greg Barnes is director of safety and environmental health at Los Robles Hospital & Medical Center and chairs the WDB Healthcare Committee. WDB Healthcare Committee member Dawn Neuman is a biology professor at California State University, Channel Islands and received the 2016 WDB Leadership Award for bringing the CLS internship program to fruition.*