NURSING EDUCATION RECEIVES BOOST FROM NEW WELLNESS CLINIC

CUMBERLAND, Md. -- Nursing education at Allegany College of Maryland has received a boost thanks to a new campus wellness clinic that enhances student learning as it provides valuable services to the college and greater communities.

The Nurse-Managed Wellness Clinic, located in ACM’s Allied Health Building, presents innovative multidisciplinary clinical experience for students in nursing and other allied health professions with a focus on community health and wellness.

Allied health students from different fields are working together in supervised clinical rotations that further prepare them for a health-care environment that emphasizes risk prevention, patient education and promotion of behaviors for healthier living.

“We are providing clinical opportunities for the students, who are providing care and working with students in other disciplines,” said Cheryl Nelson, associate professor of nursing and a nurse practitioner who is the new clinic’s director.

The collaboration among students and faculty members is fostering a team approach to health care and a sharing of skills, knowledge and teaching materials, she observed.

“We’re really able to appreciate other disciplines and what they bring to health care,” Nelson remarked. “It’s really innovative, especially for a two-year school.”

Now in its second semester of operation, the clinic has hit its stride with a full schedule of services that include screenings, examinations, immunizations and titers.

The latter -- blood tests that check immunity to common infectious diseases -- benefit allied health care students whose resistance must be determined before their clinical education in area health-care facilities can begin.

Others services benefit the larger college community and individuals and groups from the greater community.

The clinic offers immunizations for influenza and tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis, or Tdap, and also performs screenings such as tuberculosis (PPD), anemia, diabetes and cardiovascular disease through blood, blood sugar and cholesterol testing and other risk assessments.

This semester, medical laboratory technology and medical assistant students have joined nursing students in providing service to patients under the supervision of faculty members from their respective programs.
ACM nursing students from the Somerset County Campus and the Garrett County Nursing Site will join in this semester, and students in the physical therapist assistant program will contribute services starting in August.

“There are a lot of ideas for increasing usage both by the college community and the larger community,” Nelson said. “They (allied health programs) are pooling together to help our patients determine their health-risk factors.”

Contact with area agencies is helping the clinic expand its reach and increase usage. For example, Friends Aware, which serves those with developmental disabilities, will bring clients for strength testing in April.

Partnerships with the Allegany County Health Department and the Western Maryland Health System have helped the new health clinic be more effective in its services and more efficient with its resources.

The health department offers support for patients who come to the clinic lacking insurance coverage, and the diagnostic services unit of WMHS helps the clinic by processing the blood specimens that it draws in a cost-effective manner.

Nelson noted that patient education and community outreach has long been central to the education of students in nursing and other allied health professions at ACM.

“With teaching projects, nursing students have always done that in the community,” she said. “With this clinic, we are taking that one step further.”

The college established the Nurse-Managed Wellness Clinic through funding from the Maryland Health Services Cost Review Commission in cooperation with the Maryland Higher Education Commission.

Their support is helping ACM to address a shortage of nurses in the region and prepare quality nursing graduates and encourage students to continue their education for expanded roles in a changing health care environment.

ACM is the region’s leading educator of nurses and other allied health professionals, and Nelson sees the new clinic as a valuable component of their training as well as a factor in recruitment of new students.

Thanks to grant funding, which allowed for the remodeling of former office space and furnishing and equipping of the new clinic, Nelson said, “We have this really unique clinical opportunity” to offer students.

The new clinic is in operation from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Friday during the fall and spring semesters. Limited services are provided during college summer sessions.
Among clinic services in March are screenings for risk of diabetes and cholesterol testing and related assessments for risk of heart disease. Both sessions are offered from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursday, March 17.

For more information contact Ann Kephart, clinic office manager, at 301-784-5670. Information can also be found on the college website, www.allegany.edu, and its Facebook page.

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PHOTO CAPTION==Allegany College of Maryland’s new Nurse-Managed Wellness Clinic is providing multidisciplinary clinical experience for students in nursing and other allied health professions as it offers services that promote community health and wellness. Cheryl Nelson, right, is the clinic’s director, while Brenda Owens, at left, is its teaching faculty/practitioner. Both are nurse practitioners and ACM associate professors of nursing. Pictured with Nelson and Owens is the clinic’s office manager, Anna Kephart. The new facility is located on the first floor of ACM’s Allied Health Building.