

HIGHLAND

Center targets need for health-care professionals

BY PAT ROWE

Ulster County Press

Health programs abound for all ages, and we have shared some in the past weeks regarding some ongoing programs in the county.

But somebody has to staff all those programs with professional help, and that's where the Catskill Hudson Area Health Education Center comes in.

"We are an Area Health Education Center which works in areas to address shortages in the medical field," said Kathryn Reed, executive director of the program. "We work with community-based partners, and our focus is to recruit students into the employment area of healthcare professionals. We focus on the healthcare worker shortage, the people needed to deliver health care services."

According to Reed, the Highland-based office has been providing services since 2003. During the first two years of operation, Catskill Hudson AHEC funded 63 innovative and exciting educational programs. As a result of these programs, 162 medical and pre-medical students, and 431 nursing and health profession students, will be placed with 174 teachers in 72 community-based training sites.

Additionally, 2,890 young people, ages 10-17, received exposure to health careers and health professionals through interactive activities in career pipeline programs. More than 900 health professionals participated in CHAHEC-sponsored continuing education programs, Reed said.

The biggest gap is the need for nurses, and Reed attributes some of this to the limited number of positions in nursing schools and lack of faculty.

"There is a major difference in pay for a Masters Prepared Nurse in the teaching field and the work field, and they gravitate toward the higher salary," said Reed. "Pay varies all over the state, but a Masters Prepared RN might be in the workforce in a salary range of \$50,000-\$60,000, while a Masters Prepared RN might be a faculty member at a salary of \$35,000-\$40,000. We are working with communities about addressing some aspects of this, but we have no control over university salaries."

Reed said her program reaches to an 11-county area from Otsego to Rockland counties. One target population is youth, and more and more programs are being developed to target middle school-aged youth to encourage their interest in the medical professional field.

"We have two wonderful programs ongoing in Ulster County right now," she said. "One is the M*A*S*H camp and Benedictine Hospital in Kingston holds this yearly. This is a Medical Academy of Science and Health camp and geared directly for the middle school student."

BENECAMP at Benedictine Hospital is a one week summer M*A*S*H camp

'Our focus is to recruit students into the employment area of healthcare professionals.'

KATHRYN REED

Executive Director, Catskill Hudson Area Health Education Center

for 20 students. They must be from Ulster County schools and the goal is to educate participants on how the facility operates and on the variety of employment opportunities available.

"The kids come to the hospital five days that week from 8 a.m.-4 p.m., and each day the curriculum is different," Reed said. "They learn about that hospital from the boiler room to the roof. They learn about the infrastructure, they learn about the ER and the OR and the dieticians. Right now our program provides the (BENECAMP) program, and if there is a fee it is up to the individual hospitals. Several hospitals in the 11 counties we serve have these camps. Our feeling is if they can just get kids this age excited about this field, these students will gear their core courses toward the medical field."

Another popular program involves peers teaching peers and is run by Ulster County BOCES New Vision students.

"Here we have a program where the New Vision Students, high school age students, arrange a program for the middle school students," she said. "These kids do it all under the guidance of staff of both Kingston hospitals. They arrange for the district pick-up of the middle school students and start their program immediately when the bus starts. They talk about HIPPA and confidentiality and more. When they get to the hospitals it is the New Vision students that do the education component. It is peers talking to peers, and it is effective."

Reed said the feedback for all of the programs, both adult and young student, has been very positive. Recently more than 80 Emergency Medical Technicians from throughout central New York attended a CHAHEC-sponsored EMS Leadership Academy, and Reed said there is a request for more of this. Additional CHAHEC programs in Ulster County include Certified Nurse Aides and LPN Training through the Ulster Office of Employment and Training. CHAHEC supplements funds for training Certified Nurse Aides and Licensed Practical Nurses in order to provide an opportunity for youth to pursue health fields, and to maintain a continuing education pathway for those already involved in the healthcare field.

Additional information can be obtained by contacting the group's Web site at www.catskillhudsonahec.org.