



Released July 20, 2010

MSCC Offering Pharmacy Technology Program to Meet Growing Demand

Mid-South Community College will launch a grant-funded pharmacy technician training program this fall that will prepare students for one of the fastest-growing professions in the country.

With financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education through a Title III grant, MSCC will offer professional training that features all of the latest learning technology in a rapidly-evolving field.

“As is the tradition at Mid-South Community College, if we’re going to do something, we’re going to do it right,” said Jason Sparks, Allied Health & Life Sciences Program Coordinator. “We are going great lengths to ensure that our students have exposure to the most up-to-date and current technology that’s available in pharmacy practice.”

Pharmacy technician is considered one of the fastest growing career paths in the nation with projected job growth of more than 31 percent between now and 2018, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics. Beginning pharmacy techs in Arkansas and Tennessee can earn as much as \$27,000 per year with many opportunities for advancement.

“As the American population ages, the need for pharmacy services continues to increase,” Sparks said. “Additionally, as the role of the pharmacist continues to evolve, there is an increasing demand for well-qualified pharmacy technicians. Also, as scientific advances lead to new drugs and as more people obtain prescription drug coverage, pharmacy workers will be needed in ever-increasing numbers.”

Ann Oberg, with more than two decades of pharmacy technician and higher education experience, has joined the MSCC faculty as Specialist/Instructor.

“It’s an evolving profession, and we’ve stepped much farther ahead than anyone would have guessed 20 years ago,” she said. “Legislation currently under consideration would allow pharmacists to receive reimbursement for medication therapy management services, so if pharmacists are allowed to go out in front of the counter or into a consultation room with a patient, the technician will have greater responsibilities behind the counter.”

“As pharmacists become more involved with personal counseling for patients with chronic conditions, the technician will be expected to take on a higher role. They’re not just handing out prescriptions; they are actively participating in the healthcare process.”

Pharmacy technicians assist in prescription preparation, operations management, inventory management, regulatory compliance, and other duties in a variety of healthcare settings. In addition, insurance companies often hire pharmacy techs because of their expertise related to prescription medications.

Oberg said MSCC’s program is designed to train students for the challenges of tomorrow as well as the ones of today.

“What we’re stressing is preparation for the time to come because technicians in the future are going to face many more challenges than the tech of today,” she said. “Our overall goal is to prepare our students so that they can go anywhere in the country and get a job. And if they want to stay here, they can do that too because there are plenty of career opportunities in our region.”

Oberg said MSCC’s program and facilities will be conducive to producing sought-after graduates.

“We have a brand new building, and we have state-of-the-art laboratory equipment,” she pointed out. “With what we’re going to be able to bring to the program in terms of technology and instruction, we will provide a level of training that you probably won’t see at any other school in the metro area. I can almost guarantee it.”

“Having been around the country and spoken with hundreds of educators in similar roles, I am proud to say the pharmacy technology program at MSCC will be among the better equipped programs in the country.”

Students interested in a career as a pharmacy technician should possess a variety of skills.

“There is a need for a person who has a vested interest in healthcare, not only academically but personally,” Sparks said. “It takes a special person, one who understands work flow in a field and environment that is heavily regulated on multiple levels.”

“It also takes someone who is patient and has good customer service skills, someone who understands that they are dealing with sick people who are usually unhappy.”

Communication, manual dexterity, math skills, and an understanding of medications and how they work in the body are also important.

“Ideal technicians have a detail-oriented mind,” Oberg added. “They have to be able to memorize drug names and their generic equivalents as well as procedures for entering and accessing data in a computer. They have to be able to see a problem and determine how to solve it. Logical thinking is very important.”

MSCC’s program will follow accreditation standards and model curriculum established by the American Society of Health System Pharmacists.

“Pharmacy technicians are classified as paraprofessionals, but they are truly healthcare providers,” Sparks said. “They are held to high standards of professionalism, and we will emphasize that in our program.”

For more information about a career in this rapidly-evolving and professionally-rewarding field, please call Oberg at (870) 733-6042 or the Allied Health office at (870) 733-6038, access the college’s website at www.midsouthcc.edu, or visit the campus at 2000 West Broadway in West Memphis.