Personal and Home Care Aide State Training to Nurse Aide Bridge Program: A Career lattice for Direct Care Workers

A collaborative project between the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Quinsigamond Community College and Greenfield Community College

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Executive Summary

In Massachusetts Direct Care Workers (DCWs) form the centerpiece of community-based care system providing hands on support and assistance to millions of elders and people with disabilities. However, the increasing demand for this workforce is threatened by a lack of core competency training and increasing turnover rates.

Recognizing that a better trained workforce will result in improved consumer outcomes, providing career advancement opportunities was essential to retaining the workforce. The University of Massachusetts Medical School MassAHEC program entered into a collaborative relationship with Quinsigamond Community College, and Greenfield Community College to produce a career latticing opportunity for direct care workers.

The collaborative team set out to develop a bridge between the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services evidenced based Personal and Home Care Aide State Training (PHCAST) Core Competency Curriculum to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Nurse Aide Standards. The PHCAST to Nurse Aide bridge program offers career advancement opportunities for direct care workers which may contribute to increasing individual self-esteem, professional development, and increased economic stability.
Introduction

Across the globe many reports have been published indicating the growing demand for direct care workers who serve as the frontline caregivers providing hands on support and assistance to millions of elders and people with disabilities in community settings. In Massachusetts Direct Care Workers (DCWs) are known as personal care assistants, personal care attendants, personal care homemakers, and home health aides. This workforce forms the centerpiece of community-based care system; however, retaining the workforce remains a challenge with a turnover rate upwards of 60%. Many studies report causes for such a high turnover rate include the lack of career advancement.

Recognizing that a better trained workforce will result in improved consumer outcomes, providing career advancement opportunities was essential to retaining the workforce. Therefore, in December 2013 the University of Massachusetts Medical School MassAHEC program entered into a collaborative relationship with Quinsigamond Community College, and Greenfield Community College to explore career latticing opportunities for direct care workers. Together, the three institutions created a comprehensive outline that serves as the foundation to bridge the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services Personal and Home Care Aide State Training (PHCAST) Program to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) Nurse Aide Standards.

PHCAST Overview:

The MA PHCAST program provides quality core competency training to Personal and Home Care Aides, employed in home and community based settings to provide Long-term Support Services to MA elders and individuals with disabilities. The MA PHCAST standardized curriculum, appropriately named the ABCs for Direct Care Workers ensures these workers acquire the basic core competencies needed for this profession. Graduates of the course receive a certificate following successful demonstration of learned skills and knowledge that serve as a gateway into other allied health professions.

The success of the PHCAST program is grounded in proven adult learner techniques to educate and train a diverse group of workers. This non-traditional training is available in four languages, English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Brazilian Portuguese, and offers large and small group discussions, demonstrations, and a hands-on approach to learning. Pilot program outcomes have shown that providing workforce training to Limited English Speakers in their native language results in dramatic knowledge gains.

In years one and two of the grant, the PHCAST pilot trainings were available only in English; however in Year 3, 40% of participants chose to take the PHCAST training in a language other

than English. When considering participant outcomes, the individual knowledge gain ranged from 15% increase in (Year 1) to a 19% knowledge gain in (Year 2); however in Year 3 when participants were offered the training in a language other than English the individual outcomes exceeded a 38% knowledge gain. The PHCAST Year 3 evaluation report states, “Language proved to be a very important variable for Year 3 knowledge assessment analyses. Completing a non-English language training was found to be highly significant (P=0.000), indicating a definite relationship between test performance and participation in a (PHCAST) training”.

Sustainability of the workforce and reduction of turnover rates was a key goal of the PHCAST project. To that end, the PHCAST evaluation team conducted secondary and follow up studies of Year 1 and Year 2 graduates utilizing email, telephone, and paper surveys to contact graduates. A total of 164 graduates responded to the study of which 90% of reported high overall job satisfaction. More than 65% of the workers plan to remain in direct care with 46% seeking CNA/HHA positions, and 32% seeking additional training to become LPNs, RNs, or other health workers.

From 2011 to 2013 Massachusetts PHCAST trained 882 direct care workers. Of those trained 29% had less than a 12th grade education lacking a high school diploma or GED; 31% had a high school diploma or GED; 22% had secondary education or some college, but no degree; and 18% had a college degree ranging from an associate’s degree (3%) to a master’s degree (5%). Of those with advanced degrees, some were educated outside of the United States and their certifications or licenses are not recognized in this country.

Recognizing that career advancement opportunities for direct care workers contribute to their self-esteem, status, and increased economic stability; two-thirds of the MA PHCAST graduates were immediately suited for the community college setting. Additional Adult Basic Education supports are needed for those graduates who lacked a high school diploma or GED. It is also assumed that additional remediation courses would be needed to assist those with limited English to succeed in a community college program. Accordingly, given that the PHCAST graduate has received a comprehensive skill and knowledge training and effective on the job work experience, lending to an increase in self-esteem and self-reflection, these graduates are perfectly aligned to enter into a PHCAST to Nurse Aide training program.

**Federal Nurse Aide Program**

In 1987, The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) otherwise known as the Federal Nursing Home Reform Act was signed into law. One major provision of the law was that nurse aides have a minimum of 75 hours of initial training. The training outline developed at that time focused primarily on the basic skills and knowledge needed to support elders with activities of daily living (ADLs) in the nursing home setting.
The modern health care industry has changed dramatically in the decades since OBRA, due to a myriad of factors, including scientific, surgical and technological advances, cost-containment, and current economic realities in the U.S. The role of the nursing assistant in today’s modern healthcare environment is no longer purely a supportive one involving (ADL’s). The nursing assistant role has become more varied and complex, and the work environment includes nursing homes, as well as hospitals, hospice, rehabilitation facilities, assisted living, home care, adult day health programs, and other community-based settings, to name a few. As a result of these changes, most states have established additional training requirements for nursing assistants. More than half of all states (62%) require more than the minimum 75 hours; more than two thirds (68%) requiring more than 100 hours of training for nurse aides. Currently, Massachusetts remains behind the other states by adhering to the OBRA ’87 standards.

The PHCAST to Nurse Aide Bridge Program

The University of Massachusetts, Quinsigamond Community College, and Greenfield Community Collage continue to work collaboratively on this project and propose the comprehensive PHCAST core competency training serve as gateway for direct care workers, who are graduates of the PHCAST program, to advance to a Certified Nursing Assistant through a standardized PHCAST to Nurse Aide Bridge program.

Collectively this collaborative team recognizes the value of the ABCs for Direct Care Worker training; therefore proposes that PHCAST hours be credited towards a nurse aide training program. The stack ability of this core competency curriculum provides a pathway for PHCAST graduates to advance in the allied health field.

The PHCAST to Nurse Aide bridge program development team carefully dissected the PHCAST standardized core competency curriculum to effectively compare the PHCAST module activities, to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Nurse Aide training specifications. The team looked closely at the gaps that existed between the direct care worker, who provides care and support to a consumer in a home and community based setting, to the roles and responsibilities of a nursing assistant within a facility or clinical setting. The gap analysis included a determination of the MA DPH Nurse Aide specifications as well as the additional knowledge and skills that are needed for today’s nursing assistant. Utilizing industry trends, these additional specifications where considered when building the bridge program. Throughout the process, the team focused on the differences in the role and scope of practice between the DCW and Nursing Assistant. Utilizing the knowledge and expertise that exists within the team, as well as the input that was received from community stakeholders, it is the belief of the team that the DCW candidate with PHCAST training brings a valuable wealth of knowledge, skills, attitudes,

2 http://oig.hhs.gov/oig/reports/oig-05-01-00031.pdf
diversity, and work experience to the nurse aide role. This wealth of knowledge and experience is the foundation for bridging direct care workers to the expanding nursing assistant role.

To that end, the PHCAST to nurse aide collaborative recommends an expansion of the nurse aide training hours to elevate Massachusetts nursing assistant to the current health care industry. However, this increase in hours will be offset by the implementation of the PHCAST hours within the program.

Next steps for this project include completion of the bridge curriculum, followed by a carefully planned pilot training program that will be evaluated, to measure the efficacy of the training and to determine remediation courses that will needed support the success of Massachusetts non-native English learners.

In summary, the PHCAST to Nurse Aide Bridge program offers:

- A portal of entry into the workforce for individuals who lack the available resources or confidence to enter a traditional nurse aide training program
- An educational lattice for DCW’s to advance to nursing assistant; thereby retaining these valuable workers in the healthcare workforce, and promoting the self-esteem, ongoing professional development, educational advancement, increased wages and benefits for the workers
- An opportunity to increase the diversity of the health care workforce in that nearly 50% of the direct care workers self-report as minorities\(^4\) with the majority identifying themselves as Hispanic/ Latino
- An increased the availability of quality trained, competent nursing assistants to support complex healthcare industry needs in a variety of practice settings
- Opportunities to increase consumer outcomes, by providing experienced and well-educated nursing assistants who are prepared to support the transitions, admissions and discharge of residents and patients with increasingly complex medical, surgical, emotional, social, and personal care

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\(^4\) This number is estimated to be higher since Brazilian Portuguese workers self-report as white, non-Hispanic
Team Biography:

University of Massachusetts Medical School MassAHEC Program is represented by Leanne Winchester. Ms. Winchester holds a Master of Science in health management and policy, she is a registered nurse and certified in nutrition. Her background includes senior level management, grants management, curriculum development, and training. Leanne currently serves as Project Director for the Massachusetts Personal and Home Care Aide State Training (PHCAST) program and the MA Personal Care Assistants Orientation Program. Both programs exist under the Executive Office of Health & Human Services, Disability Policies & Programs. An employee of the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Ms. Winchester continues to collaborate across programs to support career development opportunities for direct care workers. An affiliate faculty member of the University Of Massachusetts Medical School, Leanne educates and orients nurse practitioner and second year medical students on public health concepts and communities as a unit of care, she also serves as Capstone Advisor to medical students.

Quinsigamond Community College is represented by Karen Hesselberg. Ms. Hesselberg holds a Bachelor’s degree in nursing and has more than 30 years of nursing experience working in the acute care, home care and long-term care industries. Karen’s past experience includes staff educator in long-term care, training nurses and certified nurse aides. Additionally, Ms. Hesselberg was a leader in the development of startup programs for nurse aide training in Central Massachusetts. She has extensive experience writing nurse aide curricula to train students seeking a nurse aide certification. She currently serves as the nursing skills lab and simulation lab coordinator at Quinsigamond Community College and is a faculty member within the nursing assistant and PHCAST training programs.

Greenfield Community College is represented by Sue Pratt. Ms. Pratt’s career began as a nurse aide. She brings over four decades of experience working with and for direct care workers. She is a strong advocate for quality care from a worker centered prospective. Sue is the Founder and Director of Tripp Memorial Foundation, a non-profit organization supporting quality of life for elders, adults with disabilities and their caregivers. Her organization has worked in partnership with GCC since 2005 providing nurse aide, home health aide, and personal care attendant training to students enrolled in GCCs community workforce training programs. An ongoing partner with the PHCAST program, Sue has supported the development of the soft skills modules, offering case management and life skills training to PHCAST participants. Sue continues to support ongoing expansion of the PHCAST program through GCC’s community programs and community partners.