

Going nuclear to help heal

Macomb's nuclear medicine technology program combines science and compassion

To the lay person, combining the terms "nuclear and medicine" may hardly seem appropriate. However, nuclear medicine does play an important role in the diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions. And, at Macomb Community College, the nuclear medicine technology program prepares students for careers as technologists necessary in a variety of health care settings, including hospitals, clinics, physician's offices and nuclear pharmacies.

While the terminology associated with the profession has a science-fiction-type flair — radioactive materials, gamma cameras and positron emission tomography — the reality is nuclear medicine technologists perform a "tremendous amount of patient care," explained Sharon Lafferty, MCC health and human services professor and coordinator of the college's nuclear medicine technology program. "A nuclear

medicine technologist administers radioactive material to a patient and takes pictures or scans of the patient," said Lafferty. "The purpose is primarily to assist the physician in making a diagnosis."

Learning to safely prepare, handle and administer radioactive materials is the emphasis of the first semester of the five-semester, 21 consecutive-month program that is limited to 15 students. First, students have to successfully complete the prerequisites of anatomy and physiology, general chemistry I and II, physics I and English composition or communications.

"This program has a selective admission," Lafferty explained. "Students are selected based on their grades in the prerequisite courses and on their COMPASS scores that test reading, comprehension and writing."

Students in Macomb's nuclear medicine technology program work with the



Macomb Community College nuclear medicine technology student Michelle Van Norstrand checks on "patient" Asha Desai while student Sandy Campbell reads the computer images an MCC Instructor Sharon Lafferty (center) supervises in the college lab.

equipment that is used in "the real world," providing them with the experience necessary for their clinicals

and direct patient contact. Nuclear medicine technologists explain the procedure to the patient, prepare a

dosage of the radiopharmaceutical and administer it, usually by mouth, injection or inhalation. Once the phar-

maceutical is administered, the technologist operates the camera that detects the radioactive drug in the patient's body.

"When they finally get to the point of clinicals, they are very excited to put their knowledge to use," Lafferty said.

For second-year student, Michelle Van Norstrand, the clinicals also confirmed that she's pursuing the right career.

"I knew the career sounded interesting, but, as I do my hospital clinicals, I'm finding that I like it even more than I imagined I would," Van Norstrand said. "The clinicals are important, because, while the labs at school teach how to use the equipment, there's nothing like actually working with patients."

Upon graduation, students have earned an associate of applied science degree in nuclear medicine technology and are prepared to sit for the national board certification, which is required by most employers in the field.

As advancements continue in the use of nuclear medicine for diagnostic purposes and medical treatment, job opportunities for nuclear medicine technologists are expected to grow over the next seven years at a rate faster than average.

For more information about Macomb's program, contact Lafferty at 586-286-2191.

Early College helps high school students get ahead

"The secret of getting ahead is getting started," Mark Twain once observed. And while he penned "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" and "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" more than a century before the current class of high school juniors were born, it appears many of them in Macomb County have discovered that this piece of Twain's advice has stood the test of time.

Since it was launched in fall 2010, 171 high school juniors have taken advantage of the Early College program at Macomb Community College. A partnership with the Macomb Intermediate School District and all 21 of the county's school districts, the program provides an opportunity for high school juniors to begin taking college courses at Macomb concurrently with their high school courses at no cost to their families, and with the use of a laptop computer provided free of charge.

Of the 55 juniors who began taking courses at Macomb when the program began last year, 43 seniors returned this fall, including Jenna Schauer, who will receive her associate degree in the spring before she graduates from Warren Woods



Jenna Schauer is a senior at Warren Woods Tower High School and a sophomore at Macomb Community College. Part of the first class of the Early College program at Macomb, she will be earning an associate degree before she graduates from high school next June.

Tower High School. She plans to pursue a bachelor's degree and a career in forensics.

Here, in her own words, is what Schauer had to say about the Early College program at Macomb.

Q. Why did you sign up for Early College?

A. I realized that it is a very rare opportunity to get ahead and start my college education. I was always one to challenge myself, and I always took advanced classes beginning when I was in the eighth grade.

Q. What courses are you taking at Macomb?

A. As of right now, I am taking anthropology, intro to Latin American and intro to mythology. Overall, I have taken 42 credits worth of classes.

Q. What has it been like to attend classes with college students who are older than you?

A. I like it much better; they're all focused and are there to learn and not to socialize. It's a much better environment, and it definitely makes learning easier.

Q. How have you balanced the demands of college with the demands of high school?

A. I've definitely learned to prioritize and in a way to "schedule" study times. I actually plan my week ahead of time, so I can make sure I have time for homework and studying. My high school study load is a lot less than my college study load, but I still take both of them seriously.

Q. Have you made any new friends?

A. Yeah, I've made a lot of new friends.

Q. What's the most important lesson you've learned so far from your Early College experience?

A. You have to be willing to make sacrifices. I've had to sacrifice a lot, including free time, friendships, and just a normal high school experience, but I know that

in the end it will all be worth it.

Q. Do you think you will be better prepared for college because of your Early College courses?

A. I don't think there is a better way to prepare someone for college than taking college courses in high school. It allows you to compare the way things are done in high school to college, and we early college students are fortunate enough to recognize them ahead of time so that we can know how to adjust and what to change to make our college experience that much easier to transition into.


Q. Would you recommend Early College to other high school students?

A. Oh, most definitely. The program has opened so many doors for me, and it has helped me save so much time and money. I couldn't imagine what it would have been like not doing the program. I know if I had turned it down, I would have regretted it.


For more information about the Early College program at Macomb Community College, contact Ed Stanton, Macomb's director of secondary outreach, at 586.445.7640 or at stantone@macomb.edu.

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For more information about CTE at the high school level contact the Macomb Intermediate School District.



Macomb Intermediate School District
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Macomb Career and Technical Education Administrators Association

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