



COMPETITIVE WORKFORCE ALLIANCE

A GREAT WORKFORCE...A GREATER REGION



[www.agreatworkforce.com](http://www.agreatworkforce.com)

# **The Competitive Workforce Alliance Allied Health Regional Skills Partnership**

## **A Study in Collaboration, Cooperation and Partnership**

From its inception, The Competitive Workforce Alliance Allied Health Regional Skills Partnership (CWAHRSP, RSP, and Partnership) turned to existing collaborations, partnerships and networks of community colleges and workforce development boards to engage supporters and members. The Partnership defined its region to match that of the 16-county Charlotte Regional Partnership, an organization of corporate executives that promotes the economic development of the counties in the Charlotte area. Under the guidance of David Hollars, Executive Director of Centralina Workforce Development Board-itself a partnership of 7 area workforce development boards-the Allied Health RSP has become a collaboration of area employers, educators, trainers, workforce and economic developers. “We wanted to cast a wide net,” said Hollars. “Our goal was to be inclusive and transparent and provide area healthcare organizations with an opportunity to create regional solutions to allied health workforce shortages.”

During the first months of operation, the Partnership focused on building membership, developing mission and vision statements, creating by-laws, and determining its organizational structure. Participation grew to include representatives from the area’s 6 largest healthcare systems, 12 community colleges, 6 workforce development boards, K-12 educational systems and JobLink Career Centers. Through this process, trust in the Partnership grew as those from competing organizations and companies built relationships and discovered common issues and goals. Healthcare employers continue to cite opportunities to interact with their counterparts from other organizations as a key reason for participation.

Simultaneously the Partnership commissioned a survey of area healthcare employers to determine the critical allied health workforce needs of the region. This primary data supported anecdotal data from Partnership members identifying the region’s most critical needs: physical therapists (PT) and physical and occupational therapist assistants (PTA and OTA), limited public education and awareness of the many allied health careers, and few proven career pathways models that allow employers to successfully encourage

existing employees to train for higher-skilled vacancies, in effect “growing their own” workforce to meet specific needs. Using this data, RSP members designed the following initiatives: a public education and awareness campaign to promote allied health careers; a pilot career pathways program that employers may tailor to specific needs, and establishing a school of physical therapy in the region. “The state’s largest healthcare employers are located in our region, yet we have no school for physical therapy here,” noted Susan Kennedy of Novant Health and RSP Steering Committee vice chair.

The Public Education and Awareness Campaign launched by the Partnership consists of two main initiatives: Allied Health Career Showcases and a central website that will showcase the varied careers, education and training programs available throughout the region, employment projections as well as specific information about the Partnership, its members and recent news. Held all across the region, the Showcases feature exhibitors demonstrating various allied health careers, educators explaining available training programs and employment opportunities, and workforce training specialists offering career and resume guidance. These Showcases have targeted adult dislocated, unemployed and underemployed workers, as well as middle and high school students considering healthcare careers, reaching more than 1,500 people across the region. They have also served to create new partnerships among employers, community colleges and workforce development professionals across the region. Exit surveys of those attending the Showcases consistently reveal amazement at the variety of careers available, and an increased interest in pursuing a healthcare career.

The Partnership’s website, [www.agreatworkforce.com/alliedhealth.cfm](http://www.agreatworkforce.com/alliedhealth.cfm), was launched as a document resource site early in the Partnership’s formation and has recently been expanded to include topical articles, results of the Partnership’s initiatives, education and training opportunities, a members’ only page and more.

Designed to become a model for other institutions to fill much-needed vacancies with existing employees, the Partnership’s first Career Pathways pilot was developed by members across the region, and is housed at Carolina’s Medical Center-Union. The hospital is offering workers assistance in career guidance and counseling, locating training programs, tuition reimbursement, access to computers and other needed equipment to train for the position of physical therapist assistant. Matching funding from the RSP pays for the career support counselor that monitors students’ progress and offers support to overcome any obstacles. The initiative was launched last year, and the first participants are now enrolled in training programs. Four of the six original participants remain in the program and are thriving. “All of these participants are working full-time and have families, so adding school can be a challenge. We are very pleased,” said Michelle Ellis of CMC-Union.

The Partnership launched a second career pathway program for anesthesia technician. Currently, candidates are hired “off the street” and receive on-the-job training to perform low-skilled repetitive tasks. The turnover rate is high and job advancement opportunities are very limited. With funding from the RSP, Carolinas College of Health Sciences is

developing a continuing education certificate program that establishes a uniform anesthesia tech training program, creating the opportunity for promotions, salary increases and better use of higher-trained staff. There is no other program like this in the state, and the curriculum will be made available to any community college. "This is very exciting," said Ellen Sheppard, President of Carolinas College of Health Sciences. "We think this will reduce job turnover, create loyal employees and allow our highest trained operating room staff to focus on their specialty skills."

Other initiatives of the Partnership include support funding to launch an occupational therapist assistant program at Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte. This will be the first community college OTA training program offered in our region. Efforts to launch a school of physical therapy are being re-evaluated. Employers acknowledge the need for physical therapists, but question whether a new school will be able to meet the demand as quickly as needed. Other options such as creative clinical opportunities are being explored.

In just three years the Competitive Workforce Alliance Allied Health Regional Skills Partnership has become an effective collaboration. It is an organization where executives from competing healthcare systems can openly discuss challenges, and work directly with multiple community and private colleges, workforce development boards, JobLink Career Centers and others, to create a trained allied health workforce that meets employer needs and provides employment opportunities throughout the region.

**For more information on the Competitive Workforce Alliance Allied Health Regional Skills Partnership please contact David Hollars at (704) 348-2717 or [dhollars@centralina.org](mailto:dhollars@centralina.org) and visit the Alliance's website at [www.agreatworkforce.com/alliedhealth](http://www.agreatworkforce.com/alliedhealth)**