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Free elder-care/personal-care attendants training being offered

By LEE IMADA, News Editor

WAILUKU – Another free course targeting the community shortage of elderly care professionals is being offered at Maui Community College, this time in the training of elder-care/personal-care attendants.

Assisted-living facilities and adult-day-care center officials have expressed a need for more of these attendants, said Patricia Duckworth, assistant professor in the college's nursing program and a force behind the course.

"The agencies were crying for people: 'We don't have any people,'" said Duckworth, noting that the last certification course was held in 2004. "They didn't have anybody to hire."

The County of Maui, Maui Long Term Care Partnership and Maui Community College have stepped into the void and are offering this free certification program. Their collaboration follows a similar grant arrangement under which 10 students recently completed a nursing-assistants course.

As of late last week, only five people had applied for the program, Duckworth said. The three-week class begins Monday, and the application deadline has been extended to Friday.

Elder-care/personal-care attendants provide basic care for patients in their homes or in community-based settings, such as assisted-living facilities and adult-day-care centers. The work includes helping clients bathe, dress and go to the bathroom. Light housekeeping and cooking may be part of the job as well.

“They generally go into the home to do these things. They become family . . . to those who need a caregiver,” said Duckworth.

In addition to the elderly, the attendants could be employed to help the ill or disabled. The course will teach basic personal care, simple nursing procedures, and basic emotional support and communication skills with clients, families and staff.

The beginning salary for an elder-care/personal-care attendant is \$10 to \$12 an hour, said Duckworth. She hopes to attract people who are older and looking at second careers. They could have limited skills and educational backgrounds; the only prerequisites are that the applicant have basic English skills and be at least 18 years of age.

The program is prepared to reach out to those people “who need to get back on their feet,” Duckworth said, noting that one of the current applicants is homeless. “We’ll do whatever we can to support them.”

Support includes offering reading help through The Learning Center at MCC, the Maui Language Institute and volunteer tutors, she said.

When selecting the 10, the program also will look for people who will remain in the profession, rather than considering the course as a steppingstone, and who will work in the county, said Duckworth. The course will not prepare those in the course for the American Red Cross Nurse Aide certification exam.

The four-credit NURS 15 course is normally a five-week course, but it is being compressed into three weeks. Classes will meet Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to noon plus 1 to 4 p.m. most days, starting next week and continuing the weeks of Jan. 21 and Feb. 4 at MCC.

Duckworth has “no doubt” that those who complete the program all will find jobs. That was the case with those who recently completed the nursing-assistants program.

“Just wham, they were employed,” she said.

Applications for the course are available in the MCC nursing office. For more information, contact Duckworth at 984-3476.

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