BC3 @ LindenPointe adds medical coding, computer science to students' options

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Stacey Reges, left, and Rachel Steere, both of Butler and students in Butler County Community College's medical coding and billing specialist certificate program, are shown in a coding II class on BC3's main campus in Butler Township on Wednesday, June 5, 2019. The one-year program will debut at BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage this fall.

(Hermitage, PA) BC3 @ LindenPointe this fall will become the second of Butler County Community College's additional locations to offer a one-year medical coding and billing specialist certificate program whose graduates could earn an average of $45,000 a year, according to the American Academy of Professional Coders, which certifies those in the field.

The program, also available at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing in New Castle and on BC3's main campus in Butler Township, prepares students for work in a profession that through 2026 is expected to see a 13 percent increase in openings, the academy reports in citing forecasts from the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"The health field is booming," said John Suesser, director of BC3 @ LindenPointe. "This is a short-term program that a student can begin and finish rather quickly, with a great education and a marketable skill."

Health care and social assistance organizations as of May employed 21 percent of the workforce in Mercer County, the highest of any type of industry, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry's Center for Workforce Information and Analysis.

The 527 health care and social assistance industries in Mercer County also exceeded that of any other type, according to North American Industry Classification System data compiled by the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis.

Medical coders translate descriptions of disease, injury and procedures into numerical designations for reimbursement of healthcare insurance claims and for maintaining accurate medical statistics.

BC3 faculty member Jessica Woessner likens the translation process to problem-solving.

"Doctors can use medical terminology that most people don't understand," Woessner said. "What medical coders do is to take that medical terminology and turn it into a simple form of information or simple language that other people can read."

Medical coders can find positions with insurance companies, research facilities, group and individual practices, nursing homes, home healthcare services and in related fields.

Many of her students aspire to become self-employed, Woessner said.

"It is a field in which you can work from home," Woessner said, adding that medical coding and billing is also a "growing field."

"Not a shrinking field," she said. "It does take a little bit of networking to find the niche you are looking for. It is definitely not going away because the medical field is always growing. The more people you have going through the medical field, the more need you have for all those doctors' notes to be transcribed and translated."

Courses in BC3's 36-credit certificate program include human biology, medical terminology, medical law and ethics, medical office procedures and coding I and II.

Upon completion of the program, graduates are prepared for entry-level positions and are eligible to take the American Academy of Professional Coders certification examination.

Medical coders without certification earn on average $45,053 per year while those with one certification earn on average $51,477 annually, according to the academy.

Medical coding and billing specialist was the most popular of BC3's certificate programs with 18 graduates in the college's Class of 2019, according to Kimberly Smith, BC3's assistant director of records and registration.

It also follows the debut of an associate degree transfer program in computer science at BC3 @ LindenPointe.

"The transfer option allows students to take the basic courses in computers and other required subjects and then be able to move on to a four-year institution with the background that they are going to need," Suesser said. "Students can then continue on and get their four-year degree in computer options, which are many."

Courses in the 60-credit program include programming fundamentals, computer information systems, PC management techniques, data structures and algorithms, and data communications and networking or database systems.

Students attending BC3 @ LindenPointe can choose from five career associate degree programs, in which students can develop the professional and technical skills necessary to start a career upon graduation; and 10 transfer programs.

"BC3 is a great place to start for someone who is looking for convenience, affordability and a great education," Suesser said.

With six locations in eight counties, BC3 has been recognized for two consecutive years as having the most affordable tuition and the highest salary-to-cost ratio among more than 40 regional colleges and universities, according to U.S. Department of Education College Scorecard data.

BC3 has also been named the No. 1 community college in Pennsylvania in three consecutive Schools.com surveys. Seventy-five percent of BC3 graduates are debt-free.

"With any student graduating from a college or university, if they get into debt, it is just going to hold them back," Suesser said. "Once they find employment, they want to lead a life where they don't have the burden of a student loan that they have to pay back over many years."

BC3's fall semester begins Aug. 26.