

Legal nurse consultant program gearing up at Western Piedmont

Western Piedmont Community College will be offering a new diploma program this fall for legal nurse consultants.

The diploma is designed to provide legal education and skills for experienced registered nurses who seek to expand their career options.

Western Piedmont's legal nurse consultant program will be offered through the existing paralegal program.

Leslie McKesson, coordinator of the WPCC paralegal program, points out some important differences between paralegals and legal nurse consultants. "First of all, in order to enter the LNC program, a student must already be a registered nurse with two years of practical experience in the medical field."

Also teaching the LNC program is Neal Bevans, a paralegal and criminal justice instructor at Western Piedmont. "We are very excited about this new program. It will offer nurses in our area the chance to expand their career choices. Many nurses are interested in the legal field, and we will provide a way for them to cross the line between medicine and law."

According to Mary Ann Shea, president of the American Association of Legal Nurse Consultants and a legal nurse consultant who works in St. Louis, this area of specialty has been growing dramatically in recent years. AALNC boasts a nationwide membership of 3,500 and has chapters in almost every state, including North Carolina.

"More and more attorneys have become interested in working with legal nurse consultants," Shea said. "Because of their medical training and expertise, they can educate attorneys on specific medical procedures. They can also review medical records and organize them for litigation. Because LNCs are registered nurses, they have the medical background to assist with personal injury cases, risk management, assessment of case management and assistance in locating expert witnesses."

Western Piedmont's LNC program is unique in many ways. Not only do veteran paralegals and attorneys teach the program; one instructor is a practicing legal nurse consultant.

"Jennifer Feigelman will be one of our part-time instructors this fall," explained McKesson. "She has been a legal nurse consultant for three years now and will bring her practical knowledge to bear in our LNC courses."

In order to complete the program, a student must complete courses ranging from legal research and writing to medical evidence analysis. "In most cases," Bevans said, "a student can complete the course load in two semesters."

Bevans also points out another interesting feature of LNC courses at Western Piedmont. "We will be offering all of our legal courses on the Internet. We were one of the first programs in the country to offer our entire paralegal degree online, and we decided to follow the same pattern with our legal nurse consulting diploma."

Students interested in enrolling in the legal nurse consulting program at Western Piedmont may contact McKesson at 438-6194 (lmckesson@wpcc.edu) or Neal Bevans at 438-6153 (nbevans@wpcc.edu).