



Don Campbell / HP staff

Instructor Kelly Parker, right, shows how to bathe a patient with senior Joyce Patterson during an Allied Health/CNA class at Benton Harbor High School Tuesday.

# Getting ahead of the pack

By LOUISE WREGE  
HP Staff Writer

**BENTON HARBOR** — There are few high school classes you can take that can lead to a job where the starting pay is well above minimum wage.

But that is exactly what graduates of the Allied Health/CNA class at Benton Harbor High School can do, according to instructor Kelly Parker, a registered nurse.

She said students in her class start earning about \$12 an hour after passing the state test to become certified nurses' aides.

"One of my girls from last year is in school in Kalamazoo," she said.

"... There's a nursing home within walking distance from her apartment. She had a job literally within applying. They work with her school schedule."

Allied Health/CNA is offered through Berrien County Career and Technical Education (CTE) through Berrien RESA.

Several of her students Tuesday said they plan to work as CNAs while going to college to get a more advanced degree in the medical field.

"I'm planning to be a registered nurse and then



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Senior Isabel Becerra practices styling on a mannequin during an Allied Health/CNA class at Benton Harbor High School Tuesday.

soon to be a physician's assistant or a doctor or a midwife. I'm not sure, yet," said Isabel Becerra, a senior at Benton Harbor High School.

She said she plans to attend Lake Michigan College in Benton Township through the Benton Harbor Promise to become a registered nurse. Then, she plans to attend Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo to go further.

Parker said Allied Health students can earn up to six college credits

in her class, which meets two hours a day for the whole school year.

"They have to pass certain tests to get the college credits," she said.

Students from all over the county can attend her Allied Health/CNA class through CTE. She said this year, two of her 18 students are from schools other than Benton Harbor High School. Last year, she said, she had six students from other high schools.

"They're top of the line," she said of her stu-

dents. "You can't survive this class if you aren't."

Washing your hands may not sound difficult, but learning how to do it properly is vital in her class.

"You can't touch any part of the sink at all," said Avolon Dohm, a junior at Lakeshore High School. "You have to scrub for 20 seconds to make sure they are clean for infection control."

Becerra said they are also taught how to make

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a bed a specific way.

“We have to make hospital corners,” she said of the bottom sheet. “The linen has to be a specific weight. Seams cannot touch the resident.”

“Because then they would get pressure points,” Dohm said.

Luis Benitez, a senior at Benton Harbor High School, said he had a hard time learning to make the beds properly. He said he took the class last school year and makes his bed at home with hospital corners to stay in practice.

This school year, he said he is taking Parker’s other class - Professional Health Careers Academy (PHCA). That class meets at Lakeland Medical Center in St. Joseph through Benton Harbor High School.

Benitez said the Allied Health/CNA class helped with the PHCA class, where students rotate shadowing medical professionals in different fields.

“If I see that they need help with something, I’m able to help because I know what it is that needs to be done,” he said. “Like, if a bed needs to be made, I can help out.”

He said some of the people he shadows have let him take vital signs because he took the Allied Health/CNA class.

Benitez said the PHCA class has helped him figure out what area of the medical field he wants to work in. Initially, he said he wanted to work as a plastic surgeon. But he said it’s too monotonous for him.

“I want to be an ER doctor or something, where it’s fast paced,



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**Students practice on mannequins during an Allied Health/CNA class at Benton Harbor High School Tuesday.**

and I’m always moving,” he said.

Parker said she has saved parents thousands of dollars.

“I had a young man who wanted to be a pharmacist,” she said. “When he went through PHCA, he even went through

(the) pharmacy (rotation) twice, and he said he didn’t want to be a pharmacist.”

Instead, she said he is going into biomedical engineering.

“He wants to be on the end where they make the meds,” she said. “He said

(pharmacists) stand still too much. It’s very meticulous, but it’s monotonous.”

Parker said anyone interested in checking out any of the CTE classes should talk to their high school counselor.

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