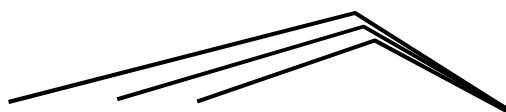


Medical Terminology Training

Prepared for the Northern Labour Market
Information Clearinghouse

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Northern Labour Market Information Clearinghouse

Introduction

Support staff in many aspects of health care need training in medical terminology in order to communicate effectively with the professionals in the field. This training is available as part of some Office Administration or Health Record Technician diploma programs or as a separate stand-alone course, most frequently delivered in Calgary and Edmonton. This report gauges the demand for new medical terminology courses in northern Alberta by looking at the number of people employed in appropriate fields and the training currently available. Most of the demand in the Clearinghouse area appears to be in the northern parts of the region. Demand elsewhere is limited. This training niche seems well-suited to Alberta North's distance delivery capabilities.

Methods

The information for this report comes primarily from a series of interviews with human resource personnel at northern Regional Health Authorities (RHAs) and medical clinics as well as with staff at training providers and Alberta Health. An Internet search provided additional information regarding available training.

Demand for Training

There is a widespread need for medical terminology training. Most people who deal with medical records need it to some degree. Those interviewed for this report identified the following occupations as those for which this training is either required or a definite asset (employers were not consistent in their requirements):

- unit clerks
- medical records personnel
- clerical staff in hospitals and clinics
- admitting clerks
- patient document technicians
- all those involved in direct patient care

The actual training demand is not great. RHAs throughout northern Alberta employ roughly 160 people for whom medical terminology training is either necessary or a definite asset. Most of the health regions' current employees already have this training and the turnover rates are fairly low in this field. As a result, health regions would not provide a large number of students for these courses on an ongoing basis. The Lakeland RHA prepared an education needs assessment in December 1996, in which medical terminology did not make the list of the "top twenty" training needs.

The exceptions to this general rule are found in the Northwest, and Northern Lights RHAs, where their relative remoteness makes it harder for people to access training. Locally delivered courses “would probably fill one course per year” according to one source.

Medical clinics are the other major employers who require medical terminology training for their clerical and support staff. A rough count of clinics advertising in Yellow Pages for northern Alberta shows about 100 clinics in the region. Each clinic has anywhere from one to six staff members who do jobs requiring, or benefiting from, medical terminology training. Conversations with personnel at a number of clinics throughout the region revealed that most of the personnel already have this training or have learned the terminology on the job. As a result, there are likely not more than 100 current clinic employees, and probably fewer, looking for medical terminology training in the region at any one time. As in the Health Regions, the employee turnover rate in clinics tends to be quite low. This means that there are few job openings at any one time for which this training would be required.

From the interviews conducted for this report, it appears that a large percentage of those in northern Alberta who have taken medical terminology training took it through correspondence or teleconferencing. Most of those contacted are quite comfortable with this mode of delivery.

Available Training

Classroom Delivery

Within the Clearinghouse, Grande Prairie Regional College and Fairview College both offer Medical Terminology courses as part of their Diploma programs in Office Administration. GPRC also offers Medical Terminology as an evening course. Many other institutions offer this training as well, including; NAIT, SAIT, AVC - Calgary, Grant MacEwan Community College and Alberta College, a private college in Edmonton. In addition to Medical terminology, SAIT offers a Health Record Technician program. This, and one like it offered by the Canadian Healthcare Association both prepare students to write certification exams for the Canadian College of Health Record Practitioners.

Distance Delivery

Medical terminology courses are well-suited to distance delivery. There are several distance-delivered courses available.

- Both SAIT and NAIT offer medical terminology courses on a Homestudy basis. SAIT also offers a Health Record Technician program via correspondence and via teleconference. Tuition for the NAIT course is \$295.
- The Canadian Healthcare Association’s Distance Education division offers a two-year health record technician program via correspondence and, beginning in January 1999, will offer a short course in Medical Terminology. Tuition for similar CHA short courses is between \$300 and \$350.

- Additional courses can be found via the Internet. One example of this is the Medical Terminology Training Program offered by the Central Business School in Marquette, Michigan (<http://www.upfirst.com>).

Comments Regarding Training

- This training would be made more valuable by combining it with appropriate computer courses, perhaps focussing on electronic medical records.
- Medical terminology training has been added to pre-employment training for Home Care Support Aides.
- Courses delivered in-person or by videoconference would have to be scheduled in evenings to accommodate students who work through the day.

Summary

The demand for medical terminology training is not large and is spread throughout northern Alberta. Given this and the proven success of distance delivery in this field, the strongest opportunity for the Clearinghouse partners lies in the use of the Alberta North delivery system to bring available courses to more, and to more remote, communities.

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