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Community College

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LaGuardia Graduates First Medical Billing Cohort Through Collaborative Partnership Model

Partners include Harvard Business School Club of New York, Weill Cornell Medicine, New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare, the NYC Department of Small Business Services & LaGuardia Community College

LONG ISLAND CITY, NY (May 4, 2016)—An innovative program designed to develop a pipeline of high-quality candidates for medical billing positions at Weill Cornell Medicine has graduated students from its first cohort at LaGuardia Community College. The program is a result of ongoing partnership and collaboration among the [Harvard Business School Club of New York](#) (“HBSCNY”), [Weill Cornell Medicine](#), the [New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare](#) (“NYACH”), the [NYC Department of Small Business Services](#) (“SBS”), and [LaGuardia Community College](#). It is supported and offered tuition-free for students through funding from SBS.

“The Medical Billing Certificate Program reflects our commitment to helping New Yorkers find stable, well-paying jobs through education,” said LaGuardia Community College President [Gail O. Mellow](#). “This program is exactly the kind of investment that makes sense: City government dollars supporting training that leads people to jobs with higher salaries and good benefits, helping them build better lives for themselves, their families and our city. Today also celebrates the unique collaboration of our college with the Harvard Business School Club of New York, Weill Cornell Medicine, New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare and NYC Department of Small Business Services – which have helped us design a program that puts people to work.”

The [LaGuardia Medical Billing Certificate Program](#) is intended for adults who are unemployed, underemployed, or employed but seeking a career with stable hours, benefits, and advancement opportunities. Entry level salaries in medical billing range from \$35,000 to \$45,000.

Among the 23 students who graduated from the first cohort, 16 were unemployed, and those working full-time were earning as little as \$10/hr. (approx. \$20,000/year). To read more about the demographics of the graduates, [click here](#).

The Harvard Business School Club of New York served as a catalyst for the [medical billing training program](#) through its [Skills Gap Initiative](#), where club members developed strategies to address critical gaps that exist when employers cannot fill well paying positions due to a shortage of adequately trained candidates. Research showed that in the New York area, this gap is particularly acute in the growth sector of healthcare services. According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), employment in the health info tech field is projected to grow by 22 percent through 2022.

“We set out to address this hiring gap by connecting a healthcare provider facing a hiring shortage with a community college with the expertise to provide the training, and are very pleased that our work has resulted in this highly productive, tuition-free medical billing program as a result of the additional support provided by NYACH and SBS,” said Barry Puritz, co-chair of the HBSCNY Skills Gap Project. “As soon as we met LaGuardia Community College President Mellow, it was clear that she understood the value of what we were trying to accomplish, and her leadership and involvement has been key to the project’s success.” To read more about the Skills Gap Project and its work on the medical billing program, [click here](#).

Before the first medical billing cohort, a pilot was conducted. Eight students completed the pilot, including Leticia Moreno Leal, who had been working as a food industry server but wanted a better job with more opportunities. She applied to the pilot of LaGuardia’s Medical Billing Certificate Program. Upon completing the program, she obtained a position as a medical billing specialist at Weill Cornell Medicine—and in less than a year on the job, she recently earned a promotion.

“Everyone at LaGuardia was very helpful, training me for a professional field in which I had no previous experience,” said Leal. “I have received accolades in my job as Account Representative; my supervisor and managers are tremendously supportive, and I feel very content because I have been promoted to Accounts Receivables Specialist. These are the kinds of opportunities that Weill Cornell Medicine has to offer. My goal is to one day be a great example to other students and give them motivation that if they have the will, they can accomplish all of their goals at Weill Cornell Medicine.”

Based on the success and learnings from the early pilot, LaGuardia partnered with NYACH to enhance the program model and offer it to students tuition-free as a result of funding support from SBS. NYACH aims to share the best practices from this Medical Billing program with other CUNY schools.

"This program is a great example of an education institution working closely with a healthcare employer with the goal of ensuring the training teaches the skills being sought after by industry, for an occupation that is in demand, and through a program model that best situates New Yorkers for success," said [Shawna Trager](#), Executive Director of NYACH.

The LaGuardia Medical Billing Certificate Program is designed to graduate adults who understand healthcare finance and who are prepared to work in leading healthcare facilities.

The program’s robust 267-hour training program – with classes four nights a week for five months – teaches participants job-readiness skills (resume preparation, communication skills, etc.) as well as technical skills (medical billing, data analysis, etc.). There is no cost to participants. Weill Cornell Medicine is closely involved at every stage of the program—from recruitment, to curriculum, to on-site training, to job placement, and more.

Each student who successfully completes the program is guaranteed an interview at Weill Cornell Medicine. “Our ideal candidate has experience in the business side of healthcare, technical and analytic skills, and an enthusiasm to work at a world class organization like Weill Cornell Medicine,” said [Ann Adenbaum](#), Senior Director of Weill Cornell Medicine’s Physician Organization Revenue Cycle. “The opportunity to collaborate with LaGuardia creates a pipeline for us of students who want to be employed in healthcare with experience.”

Noting that program graduates who have been hired by Weill Cornell Medicine so far are “dedicated, well-educated and enthusiastic,” Ms. Adenbaum added, “I like to think this collaboration is the beginning of a revenue cycle academy for future employees.”

Among the students graduating in the first cohort, 12 have been offered jobs at Weill Cornell Medicine thus far, including four who received multiple job offers from various departments within the provider. Students who are not hired by Weill Cornell Medicine will interview for positions at other NY-area healthcare providers in May.

“The skills the students learn in this program are highly transferable to other healthcare providers, so there are many opportunities for employment for these graduates,” said Jane Schulman, Vice President of LaGuardia’s Adult and Continuing Education division.

“Meanwhile, the second cohort begins May 31 and we’re hopeful for continued support,” said VP Schulman.

“Everything we do will support LaGuardia’s effort to expand the program,” said Richard Kane, co-chair of the HBSCNY Skills Gap Project. “Based on the program’s success thus far, we plan to spread the word about this extraordinary program locally through our [website](#) and other HBSCNY media, and perhaps more broadly through Harvard Business School in Boston (where HBS’s Skills Gap Initiative began) and our national alumni/club network.”

“The Harvard Business School Club of New York has become a great friend to LaGuardia Community College. In addition to our partnership with Weill Cornell Medicine, HBSCNY served as the catalyst for our work with Entrepreneurs Roundtable Accelerator (ERA), a NY incubator, to provide technology internships leading to full time jobs for our students,” said LaGuardia President Mellow. “We’re tremendously grateful for the club’s visionary dedication to public service, and for the generosity of its members, who have provided stipends for LaGuardia ERA interns and scholarships for early pilot students.”

Graduates of the Medical Billing Certificate Program receive nine college credits. Leal, who participated in the pilot of the Medical Billing Certificate program, plans to continue her education at LaGuardia by applying the nine college credits she received through the program towards an associate’s degree in Business Administration: Healthcare Management. She hopes to eventually transfer to a four-year college to earn a bachelor’s degree and continue working her way up the healthcare career ladder.

About LaGuardia Community College

LaGuardia Community College, located in Long Island City, Queens, educates more than 50,000 New Yorkers annually through degree, certificate, and continuing education programs. Our guiding principle **Dare To Do More** reflects our belief in the transformative power of education—not just for individuals, but for our community and our country—creating pathways for achievement and safeguarding the middle class. LaGuardia is a national voice on behalf of

community colleges, where half of all US college students study. Part of the City University of New York (CUNY), the College reflects the legacy of our namesake, Fiorello H. LaGuardia, the former NYC mayor beloved for his championing the underserved. Since our doors opened in 1971, our programs regularly become national models for pushing boundaries to give people of all backgrounds access to a high quality, affordable college education. We invite you to join us in imagining what our students, our community, and our country can become. Visit www.LaGuardia.edu to learn more.

About New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare

New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (“NYACH”), a public-private partnership between SBS and the NYC Workforce Funders, is an industry partnership, bringing together multiple stakeholders of the healthcare workforce development system in order to address the industry’s rapidly changing workforce needs. NYACH’s mission is to build an effective healthcare workforce development system in NYC by identifying employers’ needs, helping education and training organizations adapt to those needs, and ensuring low income and unemployed New Yorkers have access to viable career opportunities in healthcare. For more information, visit www.nyachnyc.org.

About NYC Department of Small Business Services

The Department of Small Business Services (SBS) helps unlock economic potential and create economic security for all New Yorkers by connecting New Yorkers to good jobs, creating stronger businesses, and building a fairer economy in neighborhoods across the five boroughs. SBS works with industry partnerships like NYACH to scale and sustain industry informed training models that support New Yorkers in advancing in career pathways. For more information, visit <http://www.nyc.gov/html/sbs/>.

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To watch a video of five graduates in the first cohort discussing the LaGuardia Medical Billing Certificate Program, [click here](#).

To read a *Crain’s New York Business Health Pulse* (subscription required) article about this program, [click here](#).

Demographics of the First Cohort of LaGuardia’s Medical Billing Certificate Program

- 2 Male; 21 Female
- 16 unemployed
- 7 employed full-time, avg. current salary \$15/hour (range from \$10-18/hour)
- 18 of the 23 graduates self-identify as among racial/ethnic minorities
- 80% are bilingual or multilingual
- Average age is 36 (range: 21-52 years)
- 13 graduates hold degrees (1 Master’s, 10 Bachelor’s and 2 Associate’s degrees)—majors range from nursing to computer science
- Remaining graduates have some college and are interested in finishing degree once employed
- There is one 2008 Fulbright scholar from the University of Utah
- The graduates have prior work experience in bookkeeping, finance, healthcare, technology and/or customer services
- 5 graduates have some healthcare experience and are looking to advance their career