

Diné College debuts new medical assistant program

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TSAILE, Ariz. — Diné College is debuting a new certified medical assistant certificate program—the first of its kind ever offered on the Navajo Nation. A June 30 application deadline is in place.

“Initially, we were planning for 20 students in our first cohort, but due to the coronavirus crises we have reduced that number to half, for our first cohort of the Certified Medical Assistant program starting August 2020,” Diné College microbiology professor Shazia Hakim, Ph.D., said.

“Today, we need these types of courses more than ever to prepare our locally trained workforce, so that they can help us fight COVID-19 using our own resources.”

Hakim oversees the program. She is part of both the CMA student selection and accreditation committees. Hakim said applications for the program continue to roll in, adding that there is a math entry test that students must take.

Hakim, who developed the curriculum for the program, said the major duties of a CMA are with the hospital environment or medical offices that demand face-to-face contact.

The CMA program is a 37-credit hour certificate course offered at Diné College’s Tuba City campus. Classes take place Saturday and Sunday, followed by a 10-week field externship at

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the Tuba City Regional Healthcare Corporation.

“Upon graduation, students will be awarded the CMA certificate and we will try to make sure that our graduates participate in exams offered by external bodies like the American Association of Medical Assistants, to increase their credibility in the market,” Hakim said.

CMA program graduates have a variety of job options available in such places as hospitals, medical offices, laboratories, research and teaching institutes, or students can further their studies in medical assisting at the associate’s or bachelor’s level at a college or university.

Hakim said Tuba City is the largest community by zip code on the Navajo Nation, and the CMA program is in demand around the Navajo Nation due to the lack of certified medical assistants at healthcare facilities.

She said open house participants were mostly from Arizona locations including Tuba City, Cameron, Kayenta, Chinle, Flagstaff, and Window Rock.

Hakim holds a doctoral degree from the University of Karachi in Pakistan.