



Stockton, Phila. University, Reliance Medical Announce Physician Assistant Master's Program

Atlantic City-Based Program Will Offer Two Degrees in Five Years

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Galloway Township, NJ - The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey is partnering with Philadelphia University and Reliance Medical Group to offer an Atlantic City-based Physician Assistant Studies Master's Program.

The program, which allows graduates to receive their bachelor's degrees from Stockton's School of Health Sciences and their master's in Physician Assistant Studies from Philadelphia University, was announced today at a press conference at City Hall in Atlantic City.

Reliance, which has 30 practices in Atlantic, Cape May, Camden, Mercer, Monmouth and Ocean counties, will take the medical and clinical lead in this groundbreaking program.

All courses in the five-year program will be provided at facilities in Atlantic City, although the site has not yet been determined. Students will spend the first three years taking Stockton courses and then matriculate to Philadelphia University for the final two years. Qualified students will receive their bachelor's degree from Stockton at the end of year four. Students will not have to apply for separate graduate school admission, and will be on a faster track to complete their advanced degrees.

Similar programs often take six years to complete.

"Establishing this public-private partnership demonstrates a firm commitment, not only to local college-bound students, but to Atlantic City and the entire southern New Jersey region," said Dr. Harvey Kesselman, provost and executive vice president of Stockton.

"The need for highly skilled individuals in the Physician Assistant field continues to grow and Stockton is proud to be part of an affiliation that will guarantee a preeminent program for years to come. This program helps reduce the time and cost to pursue the degrees – certainly a crucial factor for students and their families," said Dr. Kesselman.

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Stockton plans to admit up to 12 high school graduates as freshmen in the program beginning in the Fall 2015 semester and to eventually expand to 20 students, said Dr. Kesselman, who was accompanied by Dr. Theresa Bartolotta, new dean of Stockton's School of Health Sciences. Philadelphia University expects to enroll up to 24 students from its applicants starting in July 2015.

Dr. Kesselman said Physician Assistant students enrolled in the satellite program in Atlantic City will have full access to Stockton's facilities – including the library, computer labs, and fitness center.

In addition, Philadelphia University will establish labs on Stockton's campus for select courses, including a cadaver anatomy lab and a simulation lab, he said.

Reliance will provide a medical director for the program and help place students in clinical rotations with doctors and hospitals.

"Reliance is proud to be providing the medical and clinical leadership for what will be one of the most prestigious Physician Assistant Studies programs in the country," said Dr. Jon Regis, the medical group's president and CEO. "We are honored to have outstanding partners such as Philadelphia University and Richard Stockton College in this endeavor. We are also pleased to be able to house the program in Atlantic City, and bring the best in higher education back to this great city."

PAs work in conjunction with a physician and their responsibilities include taking medical histories; performing physical examinations; ordering or performing lab and other diagnostic tests; developing a treatment plan; performing health-related counseling; performing various

Demand for PAs is expected to skyrocket in the coming decade, as more patients are covered under the Affordable Care Act.

"There is a big need for health care providers in New Jersey," said Dr. Matt Dane Baker, executive dean of Philadelphia University's College of Science, Health and the Liberal Arts and a physician assistant who previously was director of the university's PA program. He was joined at the press conference by Philadelphia University President Stephen Spinelli, Jr., Ph.D.

"Being able to provide Philadelphia University's highly regarded Physician Assistant Studies program in Atlantic County, which has no current program, with superb partners who understand both the educational and medical needs of the region is a wonderful opportunity for all involved," said Dr. Baker. He noted that he is a Stockton alumnus and that the partnership "brings me home."

In the United States, PAs practice in a wide range of medical settings including hospitals, physician's offices, urgent care centers, military and Veterans Administration installations, nursing homes, industrial health and correctional institutions. Other countries such as Canada, India and the Netherlands also include PAs in their health care systems.

Atlantic City Mayor Don Guardian said he sees the program as "a major addition to the city's revitalization plans."

"As a city, we are proud that this dynamic group of medical professional and educators has chosen to locate their program in Atlantic City," Guardian said.

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