

Workforce training offered at ‘mock’ pharmacy

CVS Health and Goodwill, in cooperation with BCCC, are producing technicians

BY LORRAINE MIRABELLA THE BALTIMORE SUN

The pharmacy looks much like any other in a CVS drugstore, except pill bottles hold Skittles instead of medicine, empty bags of prescriptions line the shelves and the space occupies the ground floor of a career center at Goodwill Industries of the Chesapeake.

The “mock pharmacy” at Goodwill’s downtown Baltimore headquarters on East Redwood Street is central to a new workforce development program officially launched Thursday through a partnership between CVS Health, Goodwill and Baltimore City Community College. So far, eight students have completed a 16-week program to train people for in-demand jobs as pharmacy technicians. The students, who were given certificates Thursday, are being placed in area CVS stores.

For CVS Health, the initiative is one of the latest of its workforce development programs aimed at underserved areas. The pharmacy company offers coaching, mentoring and training programs through hundreds of partnerships with state and local programs across the country, Ernie DuPont, senior director of workforce initiatives for CVS Health, said during an opening event at Goodwill.

“CVS Health is committed to breaking down the employment barriers faced by far too many,” including for “people of all abilities and backgrounds,” DuPont said.

Alysha Faulker, 23, of West Baltimore, graduated from Mergenthaler Vocational Technical High School but was never able to finish college. She was working part-time answering phones at a car dealership when she heard about the pharmacy tech program. Faulker, who was hired at the CVS pharmacy in Target in Columbia, said she sees the tech job as a path to advancement.

“The career path to grow in this company is amazing,” Faulker said. “Pharmacy tech is a growing type of industry. A lot of people need medicines.” The mock pharmacy offered her hands-on experience in a store setting, with practice in counting out pills and managing inventory, she said.

BCCC's workforce development division, which works with local businesses and industry to offer industry certifications and customized and occupational training, has long worked with Goodwill. The college provided instructors for the pharmacy tech course, with classes in pharmacy calculations and theory. Toward the end of the course, students took part in clinical training in CVS stores.

"The pharmacy technician program not only benefits students by placing them in high demand, good-paying jobs, but it benefits Baltimore employers who need well trained, reliable employees," said James Johnson, the college's interim president.

Maryland has nearly 12,000 registered pharmacy technicians, and the number is growing, said Deena Speights-Napata, executive director of the Maryland Board of Pharmacy. Pharmacy technicians earn an average of \$13 an hour to start in Maryland, according to the jobs site Indeed.com, but the wage climbs from there as they gain experience.

Baltimore Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, who attended the mock pharmacy opening Thursday, said he had something in common with the first graduating class. As a 14-year old in South Baltimore, he worked his first job as a pharmacy technician, he said. "They didn't call it that then, they just called it, somebody working at the drug store," said the Democratic congressman, adding it gave him a sense of responsibility and hope for the future. "You decided to change the trajectory of your destinies. ... Your responsibility is to stand up so that you can be a role model."

Cummings said jobs created through partnerships, such as employers, colleges and nonprofits, are key to improving the city. "We must have jobs that lead to hope," he said, "and we must have jobs that allow people to see a vision."

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