LFCC SURGICAL PROGRAM STANDS OUT IN VIRGINIA

Posted: January 28, 2014
By REBECCA LAYNE
The Winchester Star

MIDDLETOWN — The surgical technology program at Lord Fairfax Community College gained both autonomy and full accreditation in December.

For years, the program, which prepares students to sterilize surgical instruments and assist doctors during surgery, was accredited under Piedmont Virginia Community College in Charlottesville.

Through the program, LFCC students took classes online or live via virtual classrooms.

But the arrangement wasn’t a good fit for students, according to Tina Putman, director of surgical technology at LFCC, prompting officials to bring the program to Middletown.

In 2012, Putman started the year-and-a-half process to make LFCC fully accredited on its own. This included filling out hundreds of documents and receiving an on-site visit from accreditation officials.

In December, LFCC received official accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs — making it the second community college in Virginia with a fully accredited surgical technology program. Piedmont is the other.

“It’s awesome,” Putman said. “I think we have a great, absolutely wonderful program. Students are expected to know so much information. It’s a stressful year and hard, but when they get out they know the material.”

The accreditation verified that the program was doing its clinicals correctly, its curriculum met all standards, and it had the required facilities, staffing and equipment.

Students cannot be a certified surgical technician unless they attend an accredited facility.
Although some hospitals will hire uncertified technicians, most, including those in the Valley Health system, will not.

Currently, there are 12 students in LFCC’s year-long program. Each student must do 120 surgical cases at area hospitals, including Winchester Medical Center.

To become certified, students must complete the program and pass a nationally certified test.

During their clinicals, students sterilize instruments and pass them to surgeons during operations that include craniotomies, gall bladder removals, amputations, mastectomies and cancer removal. They also open up body cavities to make them more accessible to the surgeon.

Shannon Coates, 26, of Winchester, said she was looking for a program that wouldn’t take a long time to complete and would provide job security.

“Everything we’re learning we have to remember all of it because we use all of it,” Coates said.

Jameela Abdullahi, 20, of Culpeper, said she eventually wants to be an orthopedic surgeon.

“I wanted to use it as a stepping stone on my path to get into medical school,” she said.

Winchester resident Jamie Karoly, 26, called the clinicals “really cool.”

“I wanted to be a part of a team that makes someone’s daily life better,” she said. “It’s self-fulfilling.”

— Contact Rebecca Layne at rlayne@winchesterstar.com