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Student-work placements catch the eye of healthcare industry

As the only diploma program of its kind in Canada, Centennial College's healthcare environmental services management (HESM) is preparing students for today's changing health care environment — with its increased need for infection control measures, outbreak planning, isolation cleaning needs and emergency preparedness — says the offering's coordinator.

"It's unique and there is a huge demand for professionals with the type of training we offer," says Karen Barnes, who also teaches in the two-year program. "Even a quick search on the Internet reveals that there are many positions in environmental or support services as environmental supervisors. Our graduates are getting hired right out of the program and on the low end can make \$50,000 part time."

Launched five years ago, HESM focuses on teaching students to develop, implement and monitor operating systems in the housekeeping, laundry, maintenance and transportation areas within the environmental department

of a healthcare facility. It also highlights the regulatory requirements of organizations such as the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, Health Canada, Occupational Health and Safety, and Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee.

"We offer a combination of theory and industry-specific labs so students do experiments using current technology that follows the latest trends and best practices, including a focus on going green," says Barnes. "Our faculty members are all professionals who work in the field and our advisory committee meets twice a year to discuss curriculum to ensure we are current."

It is, however, two work placement opportunities, says Barnes, that are getting students noticed by the industry. During the first placement, students shadow front-line workers once a week, while the second sees them shadowing the management team of a facility to ensure they have experience in both areas.

"We arrange the placements for our stu-



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dents and when we do, companies are going, 'Wow, there is a specific program out here, I never knew,'" says Barnes. "They are starting to realize they need people who are specifically qualified to manage these housekeeping

departments to keep the health care environment safe in all aspects for staff, patients and visitors."

For more information on the HESM program, visit centennialcollege.ca.