

Agency offers workers help amid layoffs

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A state agency has stepped in to help workers at Chabert Medical Center in Houma who face layoffs find new jobs in their field as the hospital deals with budget cuts.

“We are looking at these cuts as an opportunity. I don’t want them to think they are on their own,” said Curt Eysink, Louisiana Workforce Commission executive director. “There are a lot of other jobs they can roll into.”

Commission officials want the workers who face possible layoffs to stay hopeful. Their chances of staying employed in the health care field are greater than they think.

“This is really a unique situation, and we just happened to have a great demand in the health care field. The assistance is real. The jobs are there,” said Bryan Moore, director of the commission’s Office of Workforce Development.

Employees received a letter last week to notify them more layoffs are coming, said Marvin McGraw, LSU director of information.

“The plan is not yet finalized,” McGraw said. “We have to submit it to civil service. On (Thursday), we will know which positions will be eliminated.”

There are 245 positions targeted for layoffs, some of which could already be vacant, McGraw said. The positions would end Jan. 21.

“We are looking to move those workers with seniority into other positions at the hospital,” McGraw said.

Because health care is a growing field, state officials are optimistic.

A study conducted by Associate Director Stephen R. Barnes of the LSU Division of Economic Development forecasts that job opportunities in health care in Louisiana will increase significantly through 2020.

Primary care physicians are projected to grow from 5,923 in 2012 to 7,396 in 2020 with an additional 1,419 physicians needed to replace current ones.

Technologists will increase from 2,870 in 2011 to 3,303 in 2020 with an additional 472 needed as replacements, and technicians will increase from 2,320 in 2011 to 2,776 in 2020 with an additional 308 replacements.

Medical coders will grow from 2,360 in 2011 to 3,116 in 2020 with an additional 482 replacements.

“The state’s pipeline for nurses has been growing. A lot of nurses had trouble finding work. The state is doing a better job now, but they still need nurses,” Eysink said.

The commission’s Rapid Response Team has put in place a series of services and resources for the affected workers, including a transition center at Town Hall.

A transition center is usually established at or near the work site and is equipped with resources to help the workers understand their next steps to move into other jobs.

“The key to offering these services is that it’s no cost to them,” said Tom Guarisco, the commission’s communications director.

Affected workers can go to the center to attend orientation sessions, find out what skills they need to transition, how to fill out a resume, how to apply for other jobs and where they can go to look for other jobs. They can also receive stress management and financial aid counseling besides other services.

The newest resource making its debut at 11:30 a.m. Thursday is a job search and career exploration tool called Louisiana Star Jobs. Workers can go online at laworks.net and check out jobs and their occupational outlook, education requirements and wages.

“The site connects workers to high-value jobs first. Those high-value jobs are usually the jobs that are in high demand and well paying. We are looking to launch the mobile app in December,” Eysink said.

Commission officials said the site is well connected with thousands of jobs. Members of the commission go to businesses, find out what’s open and post the positions on the site. Businesses also post openings.

“A service we purchase scans the employment pages of private companies such as Career Builder, Monster.com and others, and adds their Louisiana jobs to our site. The service also checks our full listing of open jobs to delete duplicates,” Guarisco said.

DirectEmployers is another entity the commission uses to sign up employers and have them list their job opportunities.

“We already list many of these jobs, but this feed will further enrich our job listings. We will be adding this feed to our site in the very near future, Directemployers.org,” Guarisco said.

The commission may introduce the system to high schools and colleges.

“This is something good for counselors to have,” Eysink said.

Students would be able to learn firsthand the skills they would need for a job, the educational requirement, salary, job responsibilities and places that offer training when using the site.

Eighteen workers have already been laid off from Chabert as a part of an earlier round of budget cuts last March, and the commission’s Rapid Response Team provided two worker orientations for them at the hospital. As a result, one of the workers was referred for training to become a nurse practitioner.

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