



CASE STUDY

Gundersen Health System



BRINGING QUALIFIED MEDICAL ASSISTANTS WHERE THEY WERE NEEDED MOST

Summary

Gundersen is a nonprofit health care system located in the midwestern United States. Considered one of the top health care providers in the nation,¹ Gundersen's network comprises hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, and medical centers covering a wide range of health services. The organization employs over 700 doctors, dentists, and clinicians and more than 1,600 nurses. Gundersen's ability to staff highly qualified practitioners is core to its success.

- **Industry: Health Care**
- **Nonprofit**
- **125+-year history**
- **Employees: >7,500**

AT A GLANCE:



Problem

Gundersen Health System needed to find qualified medical assistants in a short amount of time.



Solution

Kaplan University (now Purdue University Global) developed a customized, expedited training program that could be completed within 30 weeks versus the typical 15 months.



Results

93% of the 15 baseline students passed the training program, and the organization is seeking future cohorts.

In March 2018, Purdue University acquired Kaplan University and created Purdue University Global.

In late 2015, Gundersen faced a severe medical assistant shortage and was unable to meet the staffing needs of its facility based in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Traditional external recruitment methods failed, due to geography, time constraints, and a lack of capable local partners. This was an urgent, business-critical problem for which Gundersen required an immediate solution.

Challenges

- Shortage of medical assistants
- Lack of certification/training options
- High staff turnover rates
- Urgent time frame
- Need for highly qualified cohort of medical assistants
- Failure of local/traditional external recruitment methods

Benefits

- Facilitate employee career growth.
- Promote from within.
- Increase return on educational investment (ROEI).
- Save costs by retaining current employees versus external recruitment.
- Reduce turnover.
- Build a highly skilled medical staff capable of providing exceptional patient care.

Gundersen partnered with the University to develop an accelerated medical assistant education program to train members of its current workforce. As a strategic partner to organizations and businesses nationwide, Purdue Global was well experienced in this type of collaborative innovation.

In fact, Purdue Global has created custom education programs aligned to multiple organizations' unique challenges and opportunities across industries, beyond health care, including the U.S. Army, cybersecurity, and supply chain and logistics.

SHORT-TERM TIMELINE TO TRAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANTS

Based in La Crosse, Wisconsin, Gundersen contacted the University's nearby offices to inquire about educational programs that could help address the medical assistant shortage. Gundersen was down to only a few medical assistants, and could not continue operating the facility.

The University deployed a team of strategic learning experts to determine precisely how an educational investment in Gundersen's existing employee base could drive results. The University's team included locally based experts such as the School of Health Sciences Dean and Associate Dean.

The University mapped out a customized solution that could meet Gundersen's needs and developed return on educational investment (ROEI) models to help Gundersen select the most appropriate course of action.



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Hospitals and doctors' offices are increasingly at risk due to a lack of qualified practitioners at a time of increased patient demand. As health care facilities across the country face shortages of qualified medical assistants, nurses, etc., we believe that strategic partnerships such as this one can have a powerful impact. It's a way to improve patients' lives, provide career growth for employees, align education programs to employment trends, and drive revenue for health care systems.

—*Alvin Bisarya*, VP, Health and Nursing Strategic Partnerships, Purdue Global

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CUSTOMIZED SOLUTION FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

Once Gundersen’s objectives were determined, the University’s expert instructional design team built a program to overcome the facility’s particular obstacles:

Challenge 1:

How to accelerate program delivery (while maintaining curricular integrity)

Gundersen needed their employees to complete a medical assistant program within 6 months—the University’s existing program was 15 months, which is in line with the industry standard.

Solution:

Repackage the program to meet time requirements.

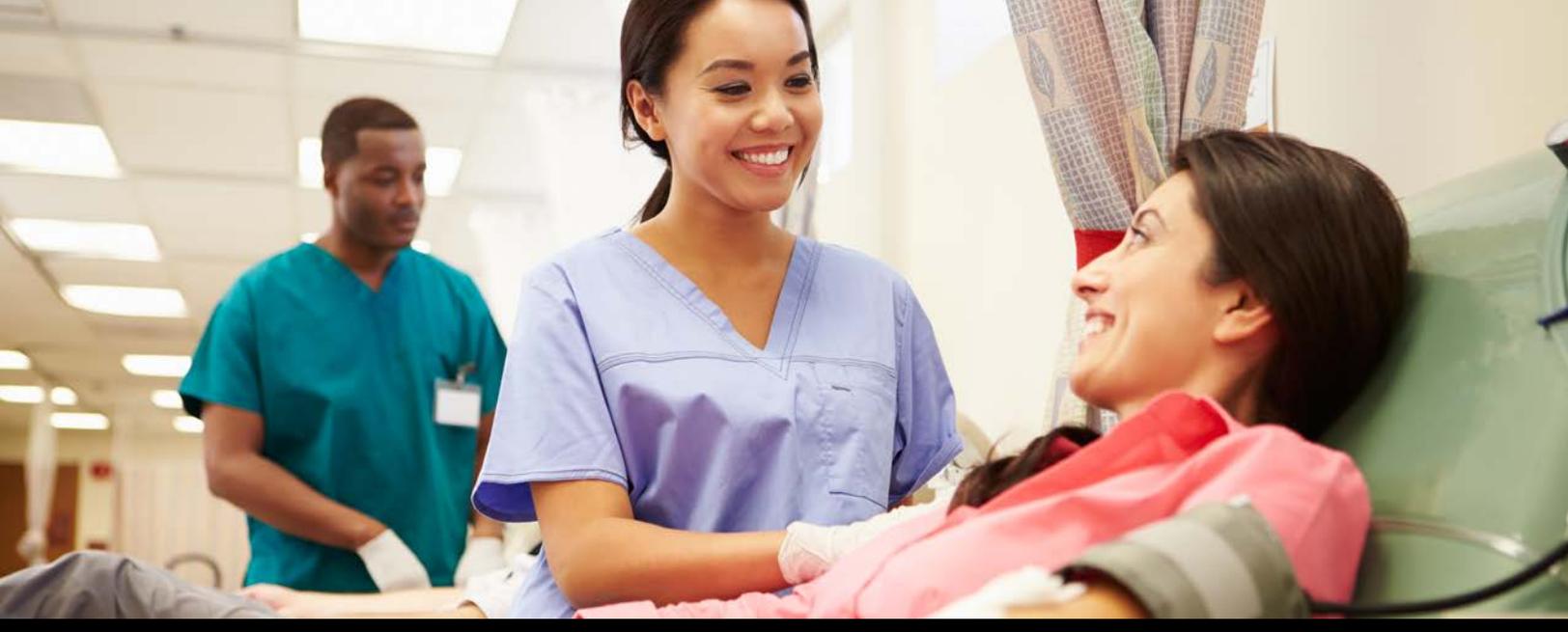
- Condense the 15-month program down to 20 weeks, which includes two intensive 10-week terms of 33 credits each.
- Employ the University’s curricular experts to build out the course content to fit Gundersen’s clinical model.
- Redesign course sequencing and prerequisite requirements to enable students to move quickly through the program while maintaining curricular efficacy.



We had been down to just a few medical assistants. [The purpose of the program] was to **stabilize turnover**. It also provided an opportunity [for employees] to do something they wouldn’t do otherwise.²

—*Mason Quackenbush*, Director of Human Resources & Recruitment Services, Gundersen Health System





Challenge 2:

How to leverage Gundersen in-house facilities/expertise

To address the urgent medical assistant staffing needs, the University would need to combine Gundersen's in-house knowledge and experience with the University's educational and curricular expertise.

Solution:

Modify the University's established hybrid model to include Gundersen's expertise and training facilities.

Onsite facilities

- Utilize Gundersen's existing simulation laboratory and medical clinics.
- Enable students to fulfill clinical and externship experiences onsite at Gundersen.
- Offer hands-on experience via in-house training opportunities.

Online platform and support

- 24/7 access to courses and resources
- Weekly discussion board topics
- Virtual submission of weekly project
- University academic support services

Challenge 3:

How to identify the right candidates

Condensing the program meant it would be intense and rigorous, but with very rewarding outcomes for the right candidates. Gundersen's challenge was to create cohorts from a pool of high-potential employees presenting entry-level existing skill levels who would be willing and able to move into careers as medical assistants.

Solution:

Collaborate with Gundersen on a rigorous selection process to identify a pool of high-potential employees.

- Educate employees about the program via specially designed internal communications and advertising.
- Develop a thorough employee selection process, including an application, interview, and rigorous selection criteria.
- Identify candidates with lower skill levels who would benefit from an upskilling opportunity.
- Identify employees with attributes appropriate for this career path.



We saw their passion and interest in patient care. Some [employees] saw it as a **great opportunity** to move into patient care.²

—*Mason Quackenbush*, Director of Human Resources & Recruitment, Gundersen Health System



Identifying the Medical Assistant Cohort

80 inquired



59 applied



29 interviewed



15 enrolled

Challenge 4:

How to help employees succeed in such an intensive program

Even for the right candidates, the workload would be intense, especially on top of the students' current Gundersen jobs and other life/family responsibilities.

Solution:

Ensure adequate support services set these students up for success.

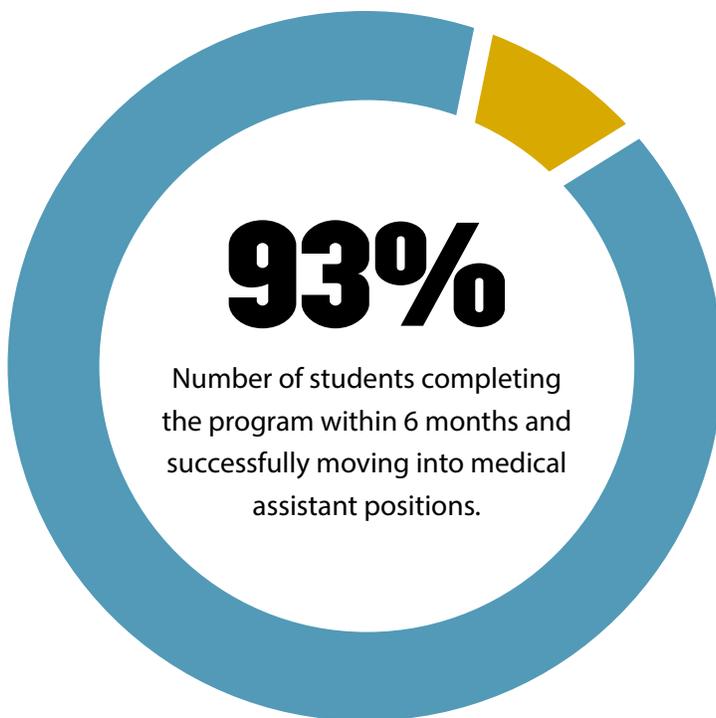
- Set a high standard and select employees who would be able to manage the courseload (per above).
- Assign a highly experienced University Student Advisor and admissions staff with health care expertise to be dedicated to the Gundersen cohort.
- Provide on-the-ground support from Gundersen managers and staff.
- Provide a full-time liaison—the University's School of Health Sciences Associate Dean offered direct student and client support.
- Maintain close contact, regularly meeting as a group to ensure all team members have the information and training to support the cohort.
- Provide ample blended online and onsite support.



Measuring Success and Results

Fifteen Gundersen employees enrolled in the medical assistant program. Fourteen of them completed the program within 6 months; one student reenrolled in the University to complete the traditional medical assistant program in the typical 15-month timeframe. Graduates have transitioned into their medical assisting positions, and feedback regarding the program has been positive.

Due to the success of the partnership, Gundersen plans to offer the program to additional employees.



Teresa Lange

Gundersen Employee

Patient Liaison: 7 ½ years

Completed medical assistant cohort program and is now a Certified Medical Assistant.

“The 6-month program was a big factor because of my family... this was the perfect opportunity.”²

“With the medical assistant program, we know it is something that **helps the organization and the lives of people who work here.**”²

—**Mason Quackenbush**, Director of Human Resources & Recruitment, Gundersen Health System

ABOUT PURDUE GLOBAL

Purdue Global strives to help adult students unlock their talent by providing a practical, student-centered, career-focused education. The University offers more than 180 online programs, and has regional locations in Iowa, Indiana, Nebraska, Maryland, Maine, Missouri, and Wisconsin.

The Enterprise Learning Solutions division of Purdue Global forges strategic partnerships with companies and organizations to improve business outcomes through innovative learning solutions. For more information, visit **EducationPartnerships.PurdueGlobal.edu**.

Purdue Global is accredited by The Higher Learning Commission

This accreditation covers all of our academic programs, all regional locations, and all programs provided via distance education. Contact HLC at hlcommission.org or call 800-621-7440.

- Total Enrollment: approx. **30,000**
- Degrees awarded 2015–2016: **12,742**
- Main campus: **Indianapolis, IN**
- Campuses and other student support and learning centers: **15**
- Faculty with doctoral degrees: **43%**

Source: The Year in Review: 2016–2017, Kaplan University Academic Report, winter 2017. These data were published prior to the March 2018 purchase of Kaplan University by Purdue University and subsequent creation of Purdue University Global.

1 Source: Healthgrades, healthgrades.com.

2 Source: As told to La Crosse Tribune. Emphasis added. On the Internet at http://lacossetribune.com/news/local/gundersen-program-boosts-employees-fills-needed-roles/article_927e1e66-bc80-52a9-b0bf-26dd0be7deff.html.



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