

Polysomnography

by Mark Robinson



As researchers and physicians are learning, sleep is important, and most people are not getting enough of it. Collin College is not putting this issue to bed. Instead, it is unveiling its polysomnographic technology program, which will start in the fall 2012.

Polysomnographic technologists run sleep studies—where a patient's sleep, heart activity, breathing and muscle movement is monitored in a sleep lab or hotel. The patient wakes the next morning well rested. The technologist goes home and sleeps. Afterwards, the technologist will present the patient's physician with the sleep study's data and the notes. The sleep study can diagnose anything from

insomnia and sleep apnea to sleep-walking and other sleep disorders.

However, polysomnography is more of a preventative science. With research advancing and sleep medicine becoming more of a norm in the medical community, sleep studies are relatively normal for a general practitioner to prescribe in order to potentially diagnose heart disease and other ailments that correlate with certain sleep disorders.

"The field is growing," said Amber Allen, coordinator of the polysomnographic technology program. "As more physicians realize how important sleep is to other bodily functions, they are sending more people for testing. As testing increases, the need for more techs increases."

Allen said there are already several

sleep labs in Dallas-Fort Worth that are interested in serving as clinical sites for the program.

"There are a lot of sleep labs. If people notice that there's a difference in their sleep or they are not getting eight hours of sleep, it is best to have a sleep study done. It's easier to get a CPAP mask (the instrument used to treat sleep apnea) than it is getting your chest cut open for heart surgery," Allen said.

Changing Lives

Collin College's polysomnographic technology program has two components. The associate of applied science degree totals 67 credit hours and spans 22 months. It will prepare students for an allied health career in the clinical care and management of sleep disorders and the administration

of sleep studies. The program will be one of only two associate-level programs in Texas and the first program in north Texas.

Secondly, the program will offer a certificate track for board-registered respiratory therapists, nurses, electroencephalographers or physician assistants, who wish to pick up additional certification. This track is also open to board-registered polysomnographic technologists who were trained on the job and wish to pursue a formal education in polysomnographic technology.

In the past, polysomnographic technologists were not required to have formal educations. As the field has grown and matured in the medical community, standards have ramped up. Over the past 60 years, the study of sleep also has taken off. It started in earnest in the 1950s and 1960s.

"Initially, scientists thought the brain shut down during sleep," said Allen, formerly of the Cleveland Clinic, where she was a polysomnographic technologist. "But after medical researchers started studying sleep, they learned that the brain was very active. There are a lot of processes that happen during sleep."

Sleep cannot only make you feel better, but it can make you look, work,

grow, study, concentrate and remember better. It's been shown that many memories and facts are filed during REM sleep. A student with a big test is better off studying and going to bed rather than cramming all night.

The body also processes calories, reproduces cells and produces growth hormones during sleep. Also, sleep or not enough of it has also been linked to depression.

"In this field, I can change somebody's life in one night," Allen

said. "People have come up to me after I fixed their sleep apnea and said they had the best night of sleep in 30 years. It's a field that you can have that type of outcome and a noticeable difference in one night."

Visit www.collin.edu/sleep for more information about the polysomnographic technology program. ❖

Mark Robinson is the public relations associate at Collin College.

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