

A Helping Hand in Technical Training



Gabriele Stabile for The New York Times

Roberto Cordero practices aiming X-ray equipment at a patient stand-in at the School of Radiologic Technology at Long Island College Hospital.

- By [JOSEPH P. FRIED](#)

Published: January 20, 2008

WHILE working as a summer file clerk in a radiology clinic in 2004, Roberto Cordero took notice of the people producing the X-rays, M.R.I.'s and other diagnostic images. He realized the work they were doing appealed to him as a possible career.

Two years later, after graduating from a community college with an associate's degree in liberal arts, Mr. Cordero applied to the School of Radiologic Technology at Long Island College Hospital in Brooklyn. Its two-year course is among the many programs offered by hospitals, colleges and vocational institutes for those seeking to become radiologic technologists.

But Mr. Cordero, a Brooklyn resident, ran into a roadblock. Not the \$8,000-a-year tuition, which he planned to pay with loans and government grants available to low-income students like himself. Rather, he failed the admission test.

But when the class began in September 2006, he was in it. After he failed the test, a pilot program called Medical Pathways provided him with two months of classes in math, human biology and other subjects. He gained admission to the course by successfully completing this pretraining path, without having to take the hospital's test again.

Medical Pathways has since given him evening tutoring to reinforce what he is learning in the course, which provides daylong regimens of classes and clinical work, and has offered personal

and career counseling. When he graduates in August, Medical Pathways will help him to find a job in a hospital, a diagnostic imaging center or a doctor's office.

"The course has been difficult," Mr. Cordero, 22, said recently, taking time out from a session in which students were practicing the positioning of patients in a radiography and fluoroscopy machine. "But it's worth it. It's a well-paying career."

The Medical Pathways program, now in its second year, is to cost \$1.5 million over its scheduled three years; it is financed by a partnership of the city's Department of Small Business Services and the New York City Workforce Development Funders Group, an association of private and corporate foundations.

The pilot program is intended to assess the value of academic and counseling support services for low-income people who appear to have the potential to work in high-growth, well-paying occupations requiring technical skills, but who need help in qualifying for and succeeding in the training. The 22 people studying to become radiologic technologists under the program are among 30 students currently in the course at Long Island College Hospital.

Medical Pathways pays only for the support services and nothing toward tuition. The program's participants, like their nonparticipating classmates, generally pay the tuition with loans, government grants and savings.

The program is also assessing similar support services in training courses, at other institutions, for emergency medical technicians and paramedics.

"We'll be closely evaluating the outcomes," said Robert W. Walsh, commissioner of the Department of Small Business Services. The goal is to determine whether the graduation and job placement and retention rates justify adopting the approach in "growth industries that have great potential for low-wage workers" seeking better-paying careers, he said.

THE federal [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) has estimated that from 2006 to 2016, employment of radiologic technologists and technicians will grow 15 percent nationally, to 226,000. Retirements, deaths and career changes in the ranks will bring total openings over the decade to 130,000, the bureau estimates.

According to the New York State Labor Department, starting pay last year averaged \$45,000 in the state and \$55,000 in New York City.

That compares with the \$15,500 average income that the radiologic technology students had before entering Medical Pathways, said Sandra Greenstein, director of career services at the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, which operates the program. She said the students had generally worked in sales or customer service jobs. (The council's name reflects its original mission in the 1970s; today it runs programs for low-income people on a nonsectarian basis, and most people in the Pathways program are not Jewish, she said.)

For his part, Mr. Cordero is looking toward the end of his demanding days in training.

"They bombard you with courses," he said. "Living is tight. But you've got to look at the big picture."