

"I believe in the community health worker model." — Kiameesha Evans, instructor, apprentice program at Rutgers University

The apprentice comes to health care

Systems are increasingly finding it's great way to bring needed people into the workforce

BY ANIALEE KHEMLANI

Stephanie Ramirez was used to handling cash registers and working in customer service, but after the single mother of two from New Brunswick found herself out of a job and not qualified for unemployment, she didn't know what to do.

After signing up for welfare and visiting job centers, she heard about the apprenticeship program for community health workers at Rutgers University and decided to apply.

After passing a background check, Ramirez completed her classes at Rutgers and is doing her on-the-job training at **Saint Peter's Healthcare System**.

Ramirez is learning how to be a community health worker. The role serves as a liaison between the health care providers and community members — particularly those who need extra time or education about health benefits of certain services and programs, or advice on which types of health care services are needed.

Health care workers like these have been implemented in places such as **Trinitas Regional Medical Center**, which has used funding from the Nicholson Foundation to train a limited number of paramedics as community workers. The goal is to be able to enter the homes of high-risk patients or potential patients and assess their needs for healthier living.

Though the on-the-job training is paying Ramirez about \$10 per hour, less than the \$12 per hour she made at her previous job, the potential to earn \$18 to \$22 after completing the training is worth the wait and temporary pay cut, Ramirez said.

See **APPRENTICE** on page 24



Stephanie Ramirez

Padma Arvind is the director of the Health Care Talent Network at Rutgers. — PHOTO COURTESY RUTGERS