

CHAPTER 1

The Profession of Medical Assisting

MEDICAL ASSISTING COMPETENCIES

CAAHEP

- IX.C (5)** Discuss licensure and certification as it applies to health-care providers
- IX.P (2)** Perform within scope of practice
- IX.P (4)** Practice within the standard of care for a medical assistant

ABHES

1. General Orientation

- a. Comprehend the current employment outlook for the medical assistant
- b. Compare and contrast the allied health professions and understand their relation to medical assisting
- c. Understand medical assistant credentialing requirements and the process to obtain the credential; comprehend the importance of credentialing.
- d. Have knowledge of the general responsibilities of the medical assistant
- e. Define scope of practice for the medical assistant, and comprehend the conditions for practice within the state that the medical assistant is employed

11. Career Development

Demonstrate professionalism by:

- 1) Exhibiting dependability, punctuality, and a positive attitude and a sense of responsibility
- 4) Being cognizant of ethical boundaries
- 9) Conducting work within scope of education, training, and ability

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing Chapter 1, you will be able to:

- 1.1 Identify the job responsibilities of a medical assistant.
- 1.2 Describe the professional training of a medical assistant.
- 1.3 Model personal characteristics a medical assistant needs.
- 1.4 Describe a multi-skilled health professional.
- 1.5 Explain the importance of continuing education for a medical assistant.
- 1.6 Explain the process and benefits of certification and registration.
- 1.7 Distinguish the benefits of becoming a member of a professional association.

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KEY TERMS

accreditation	Certified Medical Assistant (CMA)	cross-training	Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA)	Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments of 1988 (CLIA '88)	externship	practitioner
American Medical Technologists (AMT)	contaminated	Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)	Registered Medical Assistant (RMA)
		managed care organization (MCO)	résumé

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Growth of the Medical Assisting Profession
- Medical Assistant Credentials
- Membership in a Medical Assisting Association
- Training Programs and Other Learning Opportunities
- Accreditation
- Daily Duties of Medical Assistants
- Personal Qualifications of Medical Assistants
- The AAMA Occupational Analysis

PREPARATION FOR CERTIFICATION

RMA (AMT) Exam

- Professional development
- Licensure, certification, registration

CMAS Exam

- Professionalism

CMA (AAMA) Exam

- Displaying professional attitude
- Professional communication and behavior

Introduction

Medical assisting is one of the fastest-growing occupations in allied health care today. Health care is changing at a rapid rate, from advanced technology to implementing cost-effective medicine while maintaining quality patient care. The medical assistant is the perfect complement to this changing industry. Employers are looking for health care professionals who are “generalists.” A generalist is someone who is trained in all departments in the facility in which he or she is employed. Medical assistants who graduate from an accredited institution will gain the skills that enable them to multitask. A multitasking professional is someone who is able to work in the administrative areas, the clinical areas, and the financial areas. Employers are seeking credentialed health-care professionals who are dedicated to the profession and the patient.

This chapter will introduce the professional standards that are required in medical assisting.

CASE STUDY

Medical assistants are considered generalists in most medical environments. The following scenarios describe how the medical assistant functions as a generalist or multiskilled professional. As you review the scenarios, make note of the many duties the medical assistant performs.

Scenario 1 Debbie is 23 years old. She has been working as a medical assistant for 2 years. She is currently working in a family practice office with two doctors, two other medical assistants, and a medical records clerk. Her role is primarily administrative; she is mainly responsible for phone reception and patient check-in and check-out.

A 29-year-old female patient calls complaining of lower back pain. As Debbie listens to the patient describe her condition, she determines the severity of the patient’s discomfort and schedules a same-day appointment. When the patient arrives at the office, Debbie greets her at the front desk, verifies her address and insurance information, and escorts her to an exam room. After the physician completes the exam, the patient is instructed to see Debbie on the way out. Debbie reviews the patient’s prescriptions and schedules a diagnostic test and laboratory work for the patient at another facility. Debbie then collects the patient co-pay and gives the patient a receipt. After the patient leaves, Debbie prepares the insurance forms for reimbursement and files the patient’s chart.

Scenario 2 Tom is 30 years old. He has been working as a medical assistant for 7 years. He currently works as a clinical medical assistant in an urgent care center that specializes in occupational medicine and basic emergency medicine. He is flexible and works a combination of days, afternoons, and weekends. He normally works with two doctors, two nurses, and four other medical assistants during his shift. The center’s patients usually arrive on a walk-in basis.

A 40-year-old man signs in with the receptionist. She helps the patient complete the necessary forms for the medical chart. After the chart is completed, she places the chart at the clinical station. Tom reviews the medical chart and makes note that the patient, a truck driver, is here for an occupational physical. He obtains the protocol from the trucking company file and verifies the testing requested by the company. He then escorts the patient to an exam room and interviews the patient regarding his medical history. He explains all the testing that will be completed and escorts the patient to the laboratory. Tom collects a urine drug screen, following precise directions, and collects a blood specimen. Tom then performs an auditory and visual screening and escorts the patient back to the exam room. The patient is given a gown with instructions on how to put it on. After a few minutes, Tom obtains an EKG on the patient. The patient is now ready for the physical part of the exam, which is performed by the doctor. Tom verifies the information again and gives the chart to the doctor. After the doctor is finished with the exam, Tom returns to the patient, explains how the physical is reported to his employer, and escorts him to the x-ray technician for a chest x-ray. After the patient leaves, Tom completes the paperwork, submits the laboratory work to an outside reference lab, and submits the x-ray to be read by a radiologist.

Scenario 3 Patty begins her day at 5:00 A.M. Her first stop is the reference laboratory, where she collects all the necessary phlebotomy equipment needed to complete the daily visits. She then drives to the first nursing facility on her route, where she is scheduled to collect blood specimens from 10 patients. She returns to the lab to drop off the specimens and paperwork, and heads out to her second nursing facility to collect blood specimens. She continues to collect specimens throughout the day and returns to the laboratory at 1:30 P.M. She is given her schedule for the following day.

As you read this chapter, consider the following questions:

1. How are the three jobs different?
2. How are the three jobs the same?
3. How do these three medical assistants function as multiskilled health-care professionals?

Your Success as a Student

The world of medical assisting is an exciting and rewarding career path. Your success is determined by the path that you take toward your goal of becoming a medical assistant. As a new student in this field, there are several key factors that will assist you while embarking on this great career.

Key Factors for Success

There are several factors that will impact your success as a student.

1. *Organizational skills.* Students who are disorganized waste a great deal of time locating assignments and other materials before they get started on their work. Organizational skills are crucial to your success. Prepare in advance. Make sure you purchase a binder, notebook, or folders that have your homework assignments in them, reminders about upcoming tests, your course syllabus, and other pertinent information such as your instructor's office hours and phone and classmates' information for study sessions.
2. *Study habits.* Study habits will assist you with concentration and retention of the materials. Make sure you study in a quiet area away from distractions; find a study "buddy" who is just as committed and focused on success as you are; and prepare flashcards to assist you with independent studying.

3. *Set goals.* By setting goals for yourself, you can take responsibility for the results of your efforts. You must take ownership toward your success as a student. You can generate on the computer or manually a goal-setting sheet such as the one in Table 1-1.

Growth of the Medical Assisting Profession

As a medical assistant, you will be an allied health professional trained to work in a variety of health-care settings: medical offices, clinics, and ambulatory care facilities. Your role, with varied and challenging administrative and clinical duties, will be integral to creating a health-care facility that operates smoothly and provides a patient-centered approach to quality health care. Your specific responsibilities will likely depend on the location and size of the facility as well as its medical specialties.

Medical assisting is now one of the fastest-growing occupations. As the health services industry expands, the U.S. Department of Labor projects that medical assisting will be the fastest-growing occupation between 2006 and 2016. The growth in the number of physicians' group practices and other health-care practices that use support personnel will in turn continue to drive up demand for medical assistants.

TABLE 1-1 Sample Goal-Setting Sheet

Goal(s)	Study Strategies	Who? (persons involved in carrying out your strategies)	Specific Concerns?	Completion Date?
To make an "A" in my Medical Terminology class.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Flashcards and note cards 2. Study with Andrea (my study buddy) on Thursday nights before each test. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shania (myself) 2. Shania and Andrea 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I can't remember the prefixes and suffixes of medical terms 2. Finishing my presentation on time 3. I feel I am lacking the typing skills to finish presentation 	June 28, 2010 (the day before final exam)

According to the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Statistics, by 2016 it is expected that medical assistants will hold 565,000 jobs. This is up 35% from the 417,000 jobs that were held in 2006. Of these, 60% were in physicians' offices and approximately 14% were in hospitals, including outpatient and inpatient facilities. Almost 10% were in nursing homes and the offices of other health practitioners (those who practice a profession), such as chiropractors, optometrists, and podiatrists. The rest worked mostly in outpatient care centers, public and private educational services, other ambulatory health-care services, state and local government agencies, medical and diagnostic laboratories, nursing care facilities, and employment services. Modern health insurance, Medicare, and Medicaid now make medical care available to more people, and the number of physicians is increasing. Thus, more medical assistants will be needed to run these physicians' offices.

The following factors will also increase job opportunities for medical assistants: growth of outpatient clinics and health maintenance organizations (HMOs), and the population increase. Specifically, greater numbers of older people now require a relatively higher level of medical care. Today, the elderly are the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population, bringing an increase in demand for health-care services.

History of the Medical Assisting Profession

With the emergence of formal training programs for medical assistants and the continuous changes in health care today, the role of the medical assistant has become dynamic and wide ranging. These changes have raised the expectations for medical assistants. The knowledge base of the modern medical assistant includes:

- Administrative and clinical skills
- Patient insurance product knowledge (specific to the workers' geographical locations)
- Compliance, especially of OSHA and HIPAA guidelines
- Exceptional customer service
- Practice management
- Current patient treatments and education

The medical assisting profession today requires a commitment to self-directed, lifelong learning. Health care is changing rapidly because of new technology, new health-care delivery systems, and new approaches to facilitating cost-efficient, high-quality health care. A medical assistant who can adapt to change and is continually learning will be in high demand.

Creating the American Association of Medical Assistants

The seed of the idea for a national association of medical assistants—to be called the **American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA)**—was planted at the 1955 annual



Figure 1-1. The pin on the left is worn by medical assistants registered by the American Medical Technologists. The pin on the right is worn by members of the American Association of Medical Assistants.

state convention of the Kansas Medical Assistants Society. The next year, at an American Medical Association (AMA) meeting, the AAMA was officially created. In 1978 the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare declared medical assisting an allied health profession. In the early 1970s the American Medical Technologists (which has been a national certifying body for laboratory personnel since 1939) began a program to register medical assistants at accredited schools. You will read more about the benefits of joining one of these organizations later in the chapter. Figure 1-1 shows the pins worn by medical assistants who are certified by the AAMA and by those registered by the American Medical Technologists.

The AAMA's Purpose. The AAMA works to raise standards of medical assisting to a more professional level. It is the only professional association devoted exclusively to the medical assisting profession. Its creator and first president, Maxine Williams, had extensive experience in orchestrating medical assisting projects for the Kansas Medical Assistants Society. She also served as co-chair of the planning committee that formed the AAMA.

The AAMA Creed. To maintain the professional standards of the medical assisting profession, the AAMA has developed the following creed, which is reprinted here with the permission of the organization:

I believe in the principles and purposes of the profession of medical assisting.

I endeavor to be more effective.

I aspire to render greater service.

I protect the confidence entrusted to me.

I am dedicated to the care and well-being of all people.

I am loyal to my employer.

I am true to the ethics of my profession.

I am strengthened by compassion, courage, and faith.

AAMA Code of Ethics. The AAMA has also established a code of ethics, which is reprinted here with the permission of the organization:

The Code of Ethics of AAMA shall set forth principles of ethical and moral conduct as they relate to the medical profession and the particular practice of Medical Assisting.

Members of AAMA dedicated to the conscientious pursuit of their profession, and thus desiring to merit the high regard of the entire medical profession and the respect of the general public which they serve, do pledge themselves to strive always to:

- A. render service with full respect for the dignity of humanity;
- B. respect confidential information obtained through employment unless legally authorized or required by responsible performance of duty to divulge such information;
- C. uphold the honor and high principles of the profession and accept its disciplines;
- D. seek to continually improve the knowledge and skills of medical assistants for the benefit of patients and professional colleagues;
- E. participate in additional service activities aimed toward improving the health and well-being of the community.

Medical Assistant Credentials

Employers today prefer or even insist that their medical assistants have credentialing within their discipline. Understanding why employers are aggressively recruiting credentialed medical assistants is of utmost importance for medical assisting educators as well as all medical assistants. Listed here are some explanations as to why obtaining and maintaining a professional credential is becoming so important for a medical assistant's entry into and advancement within the allied health force.

Malpractice

The United States continues to be one of the most litigious nations in the civilized world. Disputes that used to be settled by discussion and mediation are now being referred to attorneys and ending up in courts of law. Lawsuits are particularly acute in the world of health care. Employers of allied health professionals have correctly concluded that having credentialed personnel or staff will lessen the likelihood of a successful legal challenge to the quality of work of employees.

An accredited medical assisting program is competency based; this means that standards are set by the accrediting body, such as the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES) or the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP), for administrative and clinical competencies. It is the duty of the educational institution to ensure that all medical assisting competencies are learned by medical assisting students and that evidence is clearly documented for each student. Periodic evaluations are performed by the accrediting agencies to ensure the effectiveness of the program. The theory of

the competencies as well as the proficiency assessments are components of the CMA (AAMA) examination. For example, administering medications is a competency required of accredited medical assisting programs and is a component of the CMA (AAMA) examination. The CMA (AAMA) credential and the affiliation with a professional organization demonstrate competence and provide evidence of training. They will also lessen the likelihood of a legal challenge to the quality of a medical assistant's work.

Managed Care Organizations

Managed care is a growing trend in today's health-care industry. The cost limitations imposed by **managed care organizations (MCOs)** are causing mergers and buyouts throughout the nation. Small physician practices are being consolidated or merged into larger providers of health care, such as by hospitals or for-profit organizations, which result in decreased operating expenses. These larger health-care providers can make the delivery of health care more cost-effective. Human resource directors of MCOs place great importance in professional credentials for their employees and therefore are more likely to establish certification or registry as a mandatory professional designation for medical assistants.

State and Federal Regulations

Certain provisions of the **OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Act)** and the **CLIA '88 (Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments of 1988)** are making mandatory credentialing for medical assistants a logical step in the hiring process. Presently, OSHA and CLIA '88 do not require that medical assistants be credentialed, but there are various components of these statutes and their regulations that can be met by demonstrating that medical assistants in a clinical setting are certified. For example, some physician offices perform moderately complex laboratory testing on site. The medical assistant can perform moderately complex tests if she or he has the appropriate training and skills. The Certified Office Laboratory Technician (COLT) certification offered by the American Medical Technologists is designed to test health-care professionals for the appropriate skills necessary to perform moderately complex laboratory tests under CLIA regulations.

CMA Certification

The **Certified Medical Assistant (CMA)** credential is awarded by the Certifying Board of the AAMA. The AAMA's certification examination evaluates mastery of medical assisting competencies based on the Occupational Analysis of the CMA (AAMA) and are available at www.aama-ntl.org/medassisting/OA.pdf. The National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) also provides technical assistance in developing the tests.

CMAs (AAMA) must recertify the CMA (AAMA) credential every 5 years. To be recertified as a CMA (AAMA),

60 contact hours must be accumulated during the five-year period: 10 in the administrative area, 10 in the clinical area, and 10 in the general area, with 30 additional hours in any of the three categories. In addition, 30 of these contact hours must be from an approved AAMA program. This mandate requires you to learn about new medical developments through education courses or participation in an examination. Hundreds of continuing education courses are sponsored by local, state, and national AAMA groups. The AAMA also offers self-study courses through its Continuing Education Department. As described in the AAMA's publication *CMA Today*, the advantages of CMA (AAMA) certification include respect and recognition from peers in the medical assisting profession.

As of June 1998, only applicants of medical assisting programs accredited by the CAAHEP and the ABHES are eligible to take the certification examination. The examination is administered nationwide every January, June, and October at more than 100 test sites. The AAMA offers the *Candidate's Guide to the Certification Examination* to help applicants prepare for the examination. This guide explains the test format and test-taking strategies. It also includes a sample examination with answers and information about study references. As of January 2009, the CMA (AAMA) examination is computerized. You may search the Internet for application and test review materials. Once you have successfully passed the CMA (AAMA) examination you have earned the right to add that credential to your name: Tiffany Heath, CMA (AAMA).

American Medical Technologists (AMT) Organization

The **American Medical Technologists (AMT)** organization, founded in 1939, credentials medical assistants as **Registered Medical Assistants (RMA)**. RMA (AMT) credentialing by the AMT ensures that you have taken and passed the RMA (AMT) certification examination for the RMA (AMT).

The AMT sets forth certain educational and experiential requirements to earn the RMA (AMT) credential. These include:

- Graduation from an accredited high school or acceptable equivalent.
- Graduation from a medical assistant program or institution accredited by the ABHES, from a medical assistant program accredited by a regional accrediting commission, or from a formal medical services training program of the U.S. Armed Forces. Alternatively, the applicant can have been employed in the profession of medical assisting for a minimum of 5 years, not more than 2 of which may have been as an instructor in a postsecondary medical assistant program.
- Passing the AMT examination for RMA (AMT) certification. RMAs (AMT) must accumulate 30 contact hours for continuing education units (CEU) every three years if they were certified after 2006. RMAs (AMT) who were

certified before this date are expected to keep abreast of all the changes and practices in their field through educational programs, workshops, or seminars. However, there are no specific continuing education requirements. Once a medical assistant has passed the AMT exam, he has earned the right to add RMA (AMT) to his name: James Wood, RMA (AMT).

Major Areas of the RMA (AMT)/CMA (AAMA) Examinations

The RMA (AMT) and CMA (AAMA) qualifying examinations are rigorous. Participation in an accredited program, however, will help you learn what you need to know. The examinations cover several distinct areas of knowledge. These include:

- General medical knowledge, including terminology, anatomy, physiology, behavioral science, medical law, and ethics
- Administrative knowledge, including medical records management, collections, insurance processing, and the **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)**
- Clinical knowledge, including examination room techniques, medication preparation and administration, pharmacology, and specimen collection

Membership in a Medical Assisting Association

Professional associations set high standards for quality and performance in a profession. They define the tasks and functions of an occupation. In addition, they provide members with the opportunity to communicate and network with one another. They also present their goals to the profession and to the general public. Becoming a member of a professional association helps you achieve career goals and further the profession of medical assisting.

Professional Support for CMAs (AAMA)

When you become a member of the AAMA, you will have a large support group of active medical assistants. Membership benefits include:

- Professional publications, such as *CMA Today*
- A large variety of educational opportunities, such as chapter-sponsored seminars and workshops about the latest administrative, clinical, and management topics (Figure 1-2)
- Group insurance
- Legal information



Figure 1-2. In this picture, a representative is giving information concerning certification to students and instructors at a local chapter meeting of AAMA.

- Local, state, and national activities that include professional networking and multiple continuing education opportunities
- Legislative monitoring. The AAMA continually works to protect your right to practice as a medical assistant.
- Access the website at www.aama-ntl.org

Networking

Networking is building alliances, socially and professionally. It starts long before your job search. By attending professional association meetings, conferences, or other functions, medical assistants generate opportunities for employment and personal and professional growth.

Professional Support for RMA's (AMT)

The AMT offers many benefits for RMA's (AMT). These include:

- Professional publications
- Membership in the AMT Institute for Education
- Group insurance programs—liability, health, and life
- State chapter activities
- Legal representation in health legislative matters
- Annual meetings and educational seminars
- Student membership
- Access the website at www.amt1.com

Training Programs and Other Learning Opportunities

Formal programs in medical assisting are offered in a variety of educational settings. They include vocational-technical high schools, postsecondary vocational schools, community

and junior colleges, and 4-year colleges and universities. Vocational school programs usually last 9 months to 1 year and award a certificate or diploma. Community and junior college programs are usually 2-year associate degree programs.

Accreditation

Accreditation is the process by which programs are officially authorized. There are two national entities recognized by the U.S. Department of Education that accredit medical assisting educational programs:

1. The Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP). CAAHEP works directly with the Medical Assisting Educational Review Board (MAERB) of Medical Assistants Endowments to ensure that all accredited schools provide a competency-based education. CAAHEP accredits medical assisting programs in both public and private postsecondary institutions throughout the United States that prepare individuals for entry into the medical assisting profession.
2. Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES). ABHES accredits private postsecondary institutions and programs that prepare individuals for entry into the medical assisting profession.

Accredited programs must cover the following topics: anatomy and physiology; medical terminology; medical law and ethics; psychology; oral and written communications; laboratory procedures; and clinical and administrative procedures. High school students may prepare for these courses by studying mathematics, health, biology, keyboarding, office skills, bookkeeping, and information technology. You may obtain current information about accreditation standards for medical assisting programs from the AAMA.

Medical assisting programs must also include an externship. An **externship** (or practicum) is practical work experience for a specified timeframe in an ambulatory care setting, such as physicians' offices, hospitals, or other health-care facilities.

Additionally, the AAMA lists its minimum standards for accredited programs. This list of standards ensures that all personnel—administrators and faculty—are qualified to perform their jobs.

The AAMA requires that administrative personnel exhibit leadership and management skills. They must also be able to fully perform the functions identified in documented job descriptions. Faculty members must develop and evaluate lesson plans, assess student progress toward the program's objectives, and be knowledgeable regarding course content. They must be qualified through work experience and be able to effectively direct and evaluate student learning and laboratory experiences.

The AAMA also has accreditation requirements for financial and physical resources. Each program's financial resources must meet its obligations to students. Schools

must also have adequate physical resources—classrooms, laboratories, clinical and administrative facilities, and equipment and supplies.

The Benefits of Certification/Registration

Certification or registration is not required to practice as a medical assistant. You may practice with a high school diploma or equivalent although opportunities for this type of on-the-job training are becoming less common. Your career options will be greater, however, if you graduate from an accredited school and you become certified or registered.

Graduation from an accredited program helps your career in three ways. First, it shows that you have completed a program that meets nationally accepted standards. Second, it provides recognition of your education by professional peers. Third, it makes you eligible for registration or certification. Students who graduate from an accredited medical assisting program, such as ABHES or CAAHEP, are eligible to take the CMA (AAMA) or RMA (AMT) immediately.

Externships

In an externship you will obtain work experience while completing a medical assisting program. You will practice skills learned in the classroom in an actual medical office environment. Because of this professional experience, you also earn the right to include your externship on your resume under job experience, as long as you title it as “Medical Assistant Externship.”

Externship Requirements. Externships are mandatory in accredited schools. The length of your externship will vary, depending on your particular program. Familiarize yourself with the program requirements as soon as possible because as a mandatory part of the program, no matter how good your grades are in class, if the externship is not completed you will not graduate from the program. You may be able to obtain an externship site of your choice either at a practice already affiliated with the school or at a practice you find on your own.

The externship is offered in cooperative medical offices or hospitals for a predetermined period (several weeks to several months). Another experienced medical assistant, nurse manager, or licensed nurse practitioner in the externship office often becomes your mentor. This mentor advises and supervises you during the externship. The “Externship” chapter (Chapter 54) further explains externship.

Externship Duties. Your duties will be planned to meet your program’s requirements for real-world work experience. Approach the externship with a positive attitude. Accept any guidance, constructive criticism, or praise as a learning experience. Figure 1-3 is an example of an externship agreement between a medical assisting school and an externship site. Note that agreements may vary.

Other Professional Memberships and Certification

The National Healthcare Association (NHA) was established in 1989 as an information resource and network for today’s active health-care professionals. They offer a variety of certification exams and continuing education. Some of the programs and services of the NHA include:

- Certification development and implementation
- Continuing education curriculum development and implementation
- Program development for unions, hospitals, and schools
- Educational, career advancement, and networking services for members
- Registry of certified professionals

Some of the certification examinations offered by the National Healthcare Association include:

- Phlebotomy Technician (CPT)
- EKG/ECG Technician (CET)
- Billing & Coding Specialist
- Medical Transcriptionist (CMT)
- Medical Administrative Assistant (CCMA)
- Medical Laboratory Assistant

The National Healthcare Association certification exams are developed by health-care educators working in their various fields of study. The NHA is a member of The National Organization of Competency Assurance (NOCA).

The National Center for Competency Testing (NCCT) is another independent agency that certifies the validity of competency and knowledge of the medical profession through examination.

Medical assistants and medical office assistants receive the designation of National Certified Medical Assistant (NCMA) and National Certified Medical Office Assistant (NCMOA) after passing the certification examination.

Volunteer Programs

Volunteering is a rewarding experience. Before you even begin a medical assisting program, you can gain experience in a health-care profession through volunteer work. As a volunteer, you will get hands-on training and learn what it is like to assist patients who are ill, disabled, or frightened.

You may volunteer as an aide in a hospital, clinic, nursing home, or doctor’s office, or as a typist or filing clerk in a medical office or medical record room. Some visiting nurse associations and hospices (homelike medical settings that provide medical care and emotional support to terminally ill patients and their families) also offer volunteer opportunities. These experiences may help you decide if you want to pursue a career as a medical assistant.

The American Red Cross also offers volunteer opportunities for the student medical assistant. The Red Cross needs volunteers for its disaster relief programs locally, statewide, nationally, and abroad.

Externship Affiliation Agreement

Name of School: _____

Address of School: _____

AGREEMENT OF AFFILIATION WITH

Name of Facility: _____

Address of Facility: _____

The (*name of school*) has been approved to conduct a (*name of program*) training program which requires clinical experience in a medical facility. The (*name of facility*) has agreed to provide this supervised clinical experience. Therefore the externship facility, now referred to as the affiliating institution, and the school, enter into the following agreement:

The school will arrange for students to affiliate at (*name of affiliating institution*) for a period of *160* hours. The specific hours/days will be agreed upon by a designee of each party and each will keep a copy of the schedule. Taking attendance sheets will be given to students and must be faxed every Monday during externship rotations.

(For medical assisting externships only): Before the student begins the supervised clinical experience, he or she will show evidence of physical requirements deemed necessary by agreement of both parties. The school is responsible for insuring that the student has had a physical exam within six months, and all recommended inoculations, before the start of the internship.

(*School/Affiliating Institution*) is responsible for student injury acquired at the affiliation site. Students and instructors will also carry liability insurance and a signed statement indicating that they have a policy covering liability against third parties resulting from this internship.

Students will be under the supervision of the clinical instructor(s) employed by the school, but may also be supervised by the professional staff of the affiliating institution. The school is responsible for providing all theory/practice instruction. Students will have received the necessary classroom and clinical instruction from the school before being authorized to perform patient care. The clinical instructor(s) will make assignments and, with the help of the professional staff of the institution, will evaluate each student's performance using the evaluation instruments provided by the school.

The clinical instructor will be present at all times students are present. The school's program coordinator will make (*frequency*) visits at the externship site.

The school is responsible for the conduct/dress requirements of the students at the affiliation site. A student who does not satisfactorily meet the requirements of this externship may be terminated. Prior to termination, the student will be notified of these deficiencies and will be given (*x*) days to correct these deficiencies.

The agreement will begin on (___/___/___) and will be reviewed annually by both parties before the agreement is renewed. A (*Length of time*) notice will be given by either party if the agreement will not be renewed. Both parties agree to contact the (*name of accrediting agency*) immediately upon requesting termination of the contract.

The affiliating institution and the school will not discriminate in regard to student externs, according to state and federal laws.

Affiliating Institute Representative, Name/Title _____

Date: ___/___/___

School Representative, Name/Title _____

Date: ___/___/___

Figure 1-3. Externship Affiliation Agreement

As part of a disaster relief team at the site of a hurricane, tornado, storm, flood, earthquake, or fire, volunteers learn first-aid and emergency triage skills. Red Cross volunteers gain valuable work experience that may help them obtain a job.

Because volunteers are not paid, it is usually easy to find work opportunities. Just because you are not paid for volunteer work, however, does not mean the experience is not useful for meeting your career goals.

Include information about any volunteer work on your **résumé**—a computer-generated document that summarizes your employment and educational history. Be sure to note specific duties, responsibilities, and skills developed during the volunteer experience. Refer to the “Externship” chapter (Chapter 54) for examples of résumés.

Multiskill Training

Today many hospitals and health-care practices are embracing the idea of a multiskilled health-care professional (MSHP). An MSHP is a cross-trained team member who is able to handle many different duties.

The AAMA includes the word *multiskilled* in its definition of the profession of medical assisting:

Medical assisting is a multiskilled allied health profession whose practitioners work primarily in ambulatory settings, such as medical offices and clinics. Medical assistants function as members of the healthcare delivery team and perform administrative and clinical procedures.

An MSHP may be trained to perform certain clinical procedures. She or he is not, however, trained to make judgments or interpretations concerning a patient’s diagnosis or treatment, as a physician would.

Reducing Health-Care Costs. As a result of health-care reform and downsizing (a reduction in the number of staff members) to control the rising cost of health care, medical practices are eager to reduce personnel costs by hiring multiskilled health professionals. These individuals, who perform the functions of two or more people, are the most cost-efficient employees.

Expanding Your Career Opportunities. Career opportunities are vast if you are self-motivated and willing to learn new skills. If you continue to learn about new administrative and clinical techniques and procedures, you will be an important part of the health-care team.

As you read this book, look for a boxed feature titled Career Opportunities. This feature highlights additional skills medical assistants can learn and integrate into their jobs to make themselves more marketable as multiskilled health professionals. Following are several examples of positions for medical assistants with various experience and certifications:

- Office manager
- Certified Office Laboratory Technician (COLT certification)
- ECG technician

- Medical transcriptionist
- Medical biller
- Hospital admissions coordinator
- A professional who performs physical exams for applicants to insurance companies
- An administrative assistant at insurance companies
- Medical Assisting Instructor (with a specified amount of experience and education)

If you are multiskilled, you will have an advantage when job hunting. Employers are eager to hire multiskilled medical assistants and may create positions for them.

You can gain multiskill training by showing initiative and a willingness to learn every aspect of the medical facility in which you are working. When you begin working within a medical facility, establish goals regarding your career path and discuss them with your immediate supervisor. Indicate to your supervisor that you would like to become **cross-trained** in every aspect of the medical facility. Begin your mastery of the department that you are currently working in and branch out to other departments once you master the skills needed for your current position. This will demonstrate a commitment to your profession as well as a strong work ethic. Cross-training is a valuable marketing tool to include on your résumé.



Daily Duties of Medical Assistants

As a medical assistant, you will be the physician’s “right arm.” Duties include maintaining an efficient office, preparing and maintaining medical records, assisting the physician during examinations, and keeping examining rooms in order. You may also handle the payroll for the office staff (or supervise a payroll service), obtain equipment and supplies, and serve as the link between the physician and representatives of pharmaceutical and medical supply companies. In small practices you will usually handle all duties. In larger practices you may specialize in a particular duty. As a medical assistant grows in his or her profession, advanced duties may be required, such as Office Practice Management, which may include marketing, and financial and strategic planning.

Entry-Level General Duties

Your general duties may vary according to state law. In an entry-level position, they may include:

- Recognize and respond effectively to verbal, nonverbal, and written communications
- Explaining treatment procedures to patients
- Patient education within scope of practice
- Facilitating treatment for patients from diverse cultural backgrounds and for patients with hearing or vision impairments, or physical or mental disabilities
- Acting as a patient advocate
- Maintain medical records

Career Opportunities

Certified Office Laboratory Technician

To gain medical assistant credentials, you must fulfill the requirements of either the American Association of Medical Assistants (obtaining CMA certification) or the American Medical Technologists (obtaining RMA certification). After acquiring your CMA or RMA certification, you may wish to acquire additional skills in specialty areas through course work or on-the-job training. The Certified Office Laboratory Technician certification is awarded by the American Medical Technologists to qualified applicants.

Nature of the Job

The Certified Office Laboratory Technician is a multi-skilled practitioner qualified by education and experience to perform medical laboratory testing, including CLIA-waived and moderately complex testing. This health-care professional is also trained to perform front and back-office tasks, as well as a variety of tasks involving direct patient contact. The position's scope of practice covers many areas and it is necessary to have knowledge of all federal and state regulations applicable to the job.

Duties and Skills

- Assists others in performing routine administrative and clinical tasks
- Answers telephones
- Processes laboratory specimens
- Assists in the collection and testing of medical specimens
- Depending on state law, performs chemical, biological, hematological, immunologic, microscopic, and bacteriological tests
- Assists with the processing, reading, and reporting of specimens to determine the presence of bacteria, fungi, parasites, or other microorganisms



Educational Requirements

Applicant must have a high school diploma or the equivalent with acceptable training. Often, Certified Office Laboratory Technicians are medical assistants who have passed the certification examination and have advanced training.

Workplace Settings

Most Certified Office Laboratory Technicians work in a physician's office or clinic. She or he may work a flexible schedule that includes evenings and weekends.

For more information, visit the websites of the following organizations, which are available on the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/medicalassisting4e.

American Medical Technologists

National Healthcare Association

Entry-Level Administrative Duties

In an entry-level position, your administrative duties may include the following:

- Greeting patients
- Handling correspondence
- Scheduling appointments
- Answering telephones
- Creating and maintaining patient medical records
- Handling billing, bookkeeping, and insurance processing
- Performing medical transcription
- Arranging for hospital admissions

Advanced Administrative Duties

Your advanced administrative duties may vary according to the practice and may include:

- Developing and conducting public outreach programs to market the physician's professional services
- Negotiating leases of equipment and supply contracts
- Negotiating nonrisk and risk managed care contracts
- Managing business and professional insurance
- Developing and maintaining fee schedules
- Participating in practice analysis
- Coordinating plans for practice enhancement, expansion, consolidation, and closure

- Performing as a HIPAA compliance officer
- Providing personnel supervision and employment practices
- Providing information systems management

Entry-Level Clinical Duties

Your clinical duties may vary according to state law. In an entry-level position, they may include:

- Assisting the doctor during examinations
- Asepsis and infection control
- Performing diagnostic tests, such as spirometry and ECGs
- Giving injections, where allowed
- Phlebotomy including venipuncture and capillary puncture
- Disposing of **contaminated** (soiled, or stained) supplies
- Performing first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)
- Preparing patients for examinations
- Preparing and administering medications as directed by the physician, and following state laws for invasive procedures
- Recording vital signs and medical histories
- Removing sutures or changing dressings on wounds
- Sterilizing medical instruments

Other clinical duties may include instructing patients about medication and special diets, authorizing drug re-fills as directed by the physician, and calling pharmacies to order prescriptions. You may also assist with minor surgery or teach patients about special procedures before laboratory tests, surgery, x-rays, or ECGs.

Advanced Clinical Duties

As with entry-level clinical duties, your advanced clinical duties may vary according to state law. They may include:

- Initiating an IV and administering IV medications with appropriate training and as permitted by state law
- Reporting diagnostic study results
- Assisting patients in the completion of advanced directives and living wills
- Assisting with clinical trials

Entry-Level Laboratory Duties

As an entry-level medical assistant, your laboratory duties may include:

- Performing Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA)–waived tests, such as a urine pregnancy test, on the premises

- Collecting, preparing, and transmitting laboratory specimens
- Teaching patients to collect specific specimens properly
- Arranging laboratory services
- Meeting safety standards (OSHA guidelines) and fire protection mandates

Advanced Laboratory Duties

As with entry-level laboratory duties, your advanced laboratory duties may vary according to state law. They may include:

- Performing as an OSHA compliance officer
- Performing moderately complex laboratory testing with appropriate training and certification

Specialization

You may also choose to specialize in a specific area of health care. For example, podiatric medical assistants make castings of feet, expose and develop x-rays, and assist podiatrists in surgery. Ophthalmic medical assistants help ophthalmologists (doctors who provide eye care) by administering diagnostic tests, measuring and recording vision, testing the functioning of eyes and eye muscles, and performing other duties. (Chapter 2 fully discusses medical specialties and medical assistant specialties.)



Personal Qualifications of Medical Assistants

There are several personal qualifications that you must have to be an effective and productive medical assistant. You must enjoy working with all types of people, possess good critical thinking skills, and be able to pay attention to detail. Empathy, willingness to learn, flexibility, self-motivation, professionalism, integrity, and sound judgment are other important traits. Additionally, you must have a neat, professional appearance; possess good communication skills; be able to work in a team environment; and know how to remain calm in a crisis.

Critical Thinking Skills

You will develop critical thinking skills over time, as you apply knowledge about and experience with human nature, medicine, and office administration to new situations. Critical thinking skills include quickly evaluating circumstances, solving problems, and taking action.

Critical thinking skills are used every day. One example is prioritizing your work—deciding which are the most important tasks of the day and which are less important. On a day where everything seems to be “top priority,” you must use your professional judgment, knowledge of office policies, and experience with physicians and



Points on Practice

Recycling in the Medical Office, Hospital, Laboratory, or Clinic

You may easily incorporate recycling procedures into the daily routine of a medical office, hospital, laboratory, or clinic. Medical facilities generate a tremendous amount of recyclable paper material. Recycling may be required by state law. Purchase paper products that can be recycled, or those made of post-consumer recycled materials, and take care in disposing of them. Care should be taken to ensure HIPAA compliance when recycling paper. Shredding is the most effective way to comply with HIPAA regulations.

Some states levy large fines for noncompliance with recycling regulations. It is thus important to have a well-organized office recycling program. There are two essential aspects of recycling: disposal and purchasing. To create a complete recycling program, ensure that materials are disposed of properly and that purchased products have been made from recycled materials.

You may easily call the town's recycling center for guidelines for packaging recycled materials and for a pickup schedule. The recycling center may also provide containers for recyclable materials. You must fulfill all town and state legal recycling requirements.

Most paper products that do not have a glossy coating (like some fax paper) are recyclable. Each recycling center will provide a list of paper materials that can and cannot be recycled.

You must also research disposal techniques for biohazardous materials and follow regulations listed in the office policy manual and OSHA guidelines. These materials cannot be recycled and must be disposed of properly. They must not be mixed with recyclable waste. You will follow the office policy manual and OSHA guidelines for hazardous medical wastes—including blood products, gloves, cotton swabs, body fluids, and sharps (needles or instruments that puncture the skin). These materials must be disposed of following standard guidelines and in a specially designed protective container.

You must keep recycling issues in mind at all times. Always choose products made from recycled materials—including paper (computer paper and letterhead), printer cartridges, pencils, and many other products.

coworkers to determine what should get done first, second, third, and so on.

You must use critical thinking skills to assess how to react to emergency situations. If you see a patient suddenly pass out in the physician's waiting room, you must quickly see that the patient receives first aid, notify a physician, and alert the patient's family.

Time Management

Personal and professional time management skills are essential skills for medical assistants. Time management is controlling how you spend your time. People who use time management techniques routinely are the highest achievers in all walks of life, professionally and personally. Using these skills will assist you in functioning exceptionally well in the medical office, even under intense pressure. What's even more important is that you can say goodbye to the often-intense stress of work overload. Concentrating on results, instead of being busy, is the main focus of time management.

Attention to Detail

The profession of medical assisting requires attention to detail. You must check every detail when administering drugs, processing bills and insurance forms, and completing patient charts.

The need for attention to detail is illustrated in the common request to call a patient's pharmacy to order a

prescription. You must accurately relay information from the doctor's prescription to the pharmacist. You must ask the pharmacist to read back the information to ensure that he has heard it correctly. Then you must document, in the chart, what has been ordered and when.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to "put yourself in someone else's shoes" and to identify with and understand another person's feelings. Patients who are ill, frustrated, or frightened appreciate empathic medical personnel.

Patients require empathy during all medical situations. For example, a patient with the flu may describe how coughing has prevented him from getting a full night's sleep. You may display empathy by saying, "I know how the flu can disrupt sleep but it's important to rest in bed, though, even if you can't always sleep."

Willingness to Learn

You must always display a willingness to learn. You will gain new skills more easily and become better acquainted with the administrative and clinical topics and issues related to the practice in which you work if you are willing to learn. Keep an open mind, listen carefully to the professionals with whom you work, observe procedures carefully, listen actively to others, and do your own homework to learn more about medical topics so you can apply new



Figure 1-4. A medical assistant who works part-time in a pediatric practice might volunteer one day a week at a preschool to learn more about working with children.

information to your daily activities. For example, if you work in a pediatric practice, you might take a continuing education class on child development at a local community college, at a YWCA, or in a workshop offered by a professional association such as the AAMA or AMT (Figure 1-4).

Flexibility

You will encounter new people and situations every day. An attitude of flexibility will allow you to adapt and to handle them with professionalism.

An example of the need for flexibility occurs when a physician's schedule changes to include evening and weekend hours. The staff may also be asked to change schedules. You must make it a priority to be flexible and to meet the employer's needs.

Self-Motivation

You must be self-motivated and willing to offer assistance with work that needs to be done, even if it is not your assigned job. For example, if you think of a more efficient way to organize patient check-in, discuss it with your supervisor. She/he may agree and be willing to give your idea a try. If a coworker is on vacation, offer to pitch in and work extra time so that patients all receive quality care and to keep the office running smoothly.

Professionalism

You should exhibit courtesy, conscientiousness, and a generally businesslike manner at all times on the job. It is important to act professionally with coworkers, patients, doctors, and others in the work setting. You are an agent

of your employer—you represent the doctor or doctors in the practice.

One example of professional behavior includes treating all patients with dignity and kindness. Another is making sure that you have completed and documented all your daily duties before leaving work at the end of each day.

You can start acting like a professional even while you are in the classroom studying to become a medical assistant. Presenting a neat appearance, showing courtesy and respect for peers and instructors, having a good attendance record, and arriving on time to class are all important elements that contribute to professionalism in school and in the workplace.

Neat Appearance

A medical professional always strives to maintain a neat appearance in the workplace. Personal cleanliness is an important part of maintaining a neat appearance. Your appearance is your first impression to your patients, coworkers, and the physicians you work with. Medical facilities and staff are considered “conservative” work environments. Your appearance should reflect a conservative style. Listed here are a few professional guidelines to follow in the medical environment:

- Your uniforms should be clean, pressed crisply, and in good repair. Your uniform should fit your body type and should not be too large or too small.
- Your shoes should be comfortable, white, clean, and in good condition. Laces should be white and clean. Avoid athletic-looking shoes. Polish your shoes on a daily basis. Only leather shoes that are not open are permitted in a patient treatment area.
- Choose a hairstyle that is flattering and conservative.
- Hair should be clean and pulled back from your face and off your collar if long. Natural colors for hair are the only acceptable color in a medical environment.
- Your nails should be a short working length, no more than one-fourth inch. Nail polish should be pale or clear. A French manicure is acceptable. Acrylic nails should be avoided. Many medical facilities are banning acrylic nails because they pose a risk for infection.
- Avoid heavy perfumes, lotions, shampoos, hairsprays, and colognes. Frequently patients and coworkers are allergic to perfumes and cologne.
- Jewelry should be kept to a minimum and in good taste. No more than one ring should be worn. Rings may tear through latex gloves. Ears can be pierced with one hole, and small earrings are appropriate. Any earrings that dangle can be torn off by a patient, such as pediatric patients. Males should not wear earrings in the medical environment.
- Tattoos should never be in a location where they can be seen by a patient.
- Body piercing and tongue piercing are not acceptable in a medical environment. Patients may view this as a

visual threat and question your level of competence. Many physicians will rule you out on the first interview if a body piercing (other than ears) is present.

- Bathe or shower daily and use an antiperspirant.
- Brush your teeth at least twice daily and schedule regular dental visits to maintain oral health and hygiene.
- Schedule regular checkups with your personal physician.
- Get plenty of rest and eat a well-balanced diet.
- If you are not required to wear a uniform, choose clothing that is conservative and business-appropriate. Avoid fad fashions. Wear low-heeled or flat, polished shoes and a lab coat if working in a clinical area with patients.

Some activities may make it difficult to maintain a neat appearance—replacing the toner in the copy machine, for example, or filling the developing solution in the x-ray machine. Always store a spare uniform or business outfit at your workplace.

Attitude

Your attitude will leave an impression of the type of person you are. In the medical environment, many people depend on you, including coworkers and patients. Your attitude can make or break your career. Professionals always project a positive, caring attitude. They respond to criticism as a learning experience. They take direction from authority without question. They function as a vital member of a medical team. A negative attitude will not be acceptable in a team-oriented medical environment. Many people do not know they have a negative attitude. Ask yourself these questions, and determine if you need to make improvements in your attitude before you begin your new career.

- Do I have repeated conflict with friends or family?
- Have I had a conflict at work that has resulted in voluntary or involuntary termination?
- Do I have conflict with authority figures, such as my instructors?
- Do people make comments about my attitude?

In the workplace environment, professional medical assistants are pleasant, smiling, and conducting themselves in a businesslike and professional manner.

Integrity and Honesty

People with integrity hold themselves to high standards. Everything they do, every task they complete, is performed with a goal of excellence. Individuals with integrity take extreme pride in everything they do. The characteristics of integrity are honesty, dependability, and reliability. Integrity and honesty are key in providing superior customer service to your patients. You must follow through on everything you say you are going to do. For example, if you tell a patient that you are going to return their call regarding a medication, you must call the patient at the time you

indicated. Professionals with integrity are honest with the staff and physicians they work with. If you make an error, be honest about it. In order to have integrity, you must be dependable and reliable. Your office staff and physician must be able to trust you and the decisions you make.

Diplomacy

Diplomacy is the ability to communicate with patients, coworkers, managers, and physicians in a manner that is not offensive and that both expresses and inspires cooperation. Communicating with diplomacy is communicating with tact. Medical assistants are often exposed to situations that they may not agree with. A professional has the ability to look at both sides of a situation and to handle it with courtesy and professionalism.

Proper Judgment

You should demonstrate proper judgment in every task. Before making an important decision, you must carefully evaluate each possible outcome.

An example of a situation that requires proper judgment is assessing when an exception should be made in a doctor's schedule of patients. Suppose the next patient on the schedule is in the waiting room. She is having a routine checkup. An unscheduled patient comes in with chest pains. You use proper judgment and allow the patient with chest pains to see the doctor first.

Communication Skills

Effective communication involves careful listening, observing, speaking, and writing. Communication even involves good manners—being polite, tactful, and respectful. You must use good communication skills during every patient discussion and in every interaction you have with physicians, other staff members, and other professionals with whom your practice does business. The chapter “Communication with Patients, Families, and Coworkers” (Chapter 4) discusses communication skills in more detail.

Remaining Calm in a Crisis

There is always the potential for a crisis or emergency in the health-care field. During a crisis you must remain calm and be prepared to handle any situation.

An example of the need for calm and effective action occurs when a patient appears to suffer a stroke while sitting in the waiting room of a busy medical office. You must quickly direct your peers to alert the doctor and remove the other patients from the room while you begin emergency first-aid measures.

Willingness to Work as a Team Member

Working with and as a member of the health-care team is critical for the overall efficiency of the medical facility.

Everyone in the facility has an important job that depends on someone else. It is important to remember that the patient comes first and everyone is responsible for the care of that patient. Team dynamics consist of:

- Assisting each other on a daily basis with the duties required
- Avoiding interpersonal conflict with members of the team
- Performing extra responsibilities without questioning or complaining
- Being considerate of all other team members' duties and responsibilities

Ethical Behavior

Ethics is a system of values that determines right or wrong behavior. Our standard of values is learned by our life experiences. Ethical behavior can have a strong, positive impact on the profession of medical assisting and on the overall reputation of medical assistants in the health-care community. Your professional ethics will involve your relationship with patients and families, your relationship with other allied health professionals, and facilities and your community as a whole. The AAMA Code of Ethics is designed to elevate the profession of medical assisting to a profession of dignity and respect.

The AAMA Occupational Analysis

In 1996 the AAMA formed a committee whose goal was to revise and update its standards for the accreditation of programs that teach medical assisting. The committee's findings were published in 1997 as the "AAMA Role Delineation Study: Occupational Analysis of the Medical Assistant Profession." The study included a new Role Delineation Chart that outlined the areas of competence to be mastered as an entry-level medical assistant. The Role Delineation Chart of the CMA (AAMA) was further updated in 2003 to include additional competencies and in 2009 was updated again and was renamed the Occupational Analysis of the CMA (AAMA).

Areas of Competence

The Medical Assistant Occupational Analysis provides the basis for medical assisting education and evaluation. Mastery of the areas of competence listed in this Occupational Analysis is required for all students in accredited medical assisting programs. The Occupational Analysis shows three areas of competence: administrative, clinical, and general. Each of these three areas is divided into two or more narrower areas, for a total of ten specific areas of competence. Within each area, a bulleted list of statements describes the medical assistant's role.

Uses of the Occupational Analysis

According to the AAMA, Occupational Analysis may be used to:

- Describe the field of medical assisting to other health-care professionals
- Identify entry-level areas of competence for medical assistants
- Help practitioners assess their own current competence in the field
- Aid in the development of continuing education programs
- Prepare appropriate types of materials for home study

Scope of Practice

Medical assistants are not "licensed" health-care professionals and most often work under another licensed health-care provider, such as a nurse or physician. Licensed health-care professionals may delegate certain duties to a medical assistant, providing she or he has had the appropriate training through an accredited medical assisting program or through on-the-job training provided by the medical facility or physician. Questions often arise regarding the kinds of duties a medical assistant can perform, such as:

- What kinds of clinical duties can a medical assistant lawfully perform?
- Is a medical assistant permitted to start an IV?
- Can a medical assistant run lab tests? If so, which tests are allowed?

There is no universal answer to any of the above questions. There is no single national definition of a medical assistant's scope of practice. Therefore, the medical assistant must research the state in which he or she works to learn about the scope of practice in his or her state. In general, a medical assistant may not perform procedures for which he or she was not educated or trained. The AAMA and AMT are good resources to assist you in your research. The AAMA Occupational Analysis is also a good reference source that identifies the procedures that medical assistants are educated to perform.

Summary

- 1.1 The responsibility of a medical assistant varies from entry-level administrative duties to entry-level laboratory duties.
- 1.2 Professional training for medical assistants includes formal training in a variety of educational settings (i.e., postsecondary vocational schools, four-year colleges).

- 1.3 Some of the personal characteristics of medical assistants are flexibility, attentiveness to detail, and excellent communication skills.
- 1.4 Cross-training becomes more crucial as organizations downsize. Medical assistants are much more marketable if they are multiskilled.
- 1.5 Continuing education keeps you abreast of changing technology, procedures, and state, local, and federal regulations.

- 1.6 Certification and registration provide recognition of your education by peers and for advancement in your career.
- 1.7 Professional membership affiliation provides networking opportunities and access to potential employers.

REVIEW

CHAPTER 1

CASE STUDY QUESTIONS

Now that you have completed this chapter, review the case study at the beginning of the chapter and answer the following questions:

- 1. How are the three jobs different?
- 2. How are the three jobs the same?
- 3. How do these three medical assistants function as multiskilled health-care professionals?

- c. provide externships.
- d. use their resources to support CMAs' (AAMA) and RMAs' (AMT) continuing education.
- 5. The increase in job opportunities for medical assistants is due to
 - a. population increase, wage increases, and increases in births.
 - b. the growth of outpatient clinics and HMOs.
 - c. patient education and professional membership.
 - d. the ability to handle patients' privacy.

Multiple-Choice Questions

- 1. Two accrediting bodies for medical assisting programs are
 - a. ABHES and OSHA.
 - b. OSHA and AAMA.
 - c. ABHES and CAAHEP.
 - d. CAAHEP and CLIA.
- 2. Entry-level clinical duties for a medical assistant include
 - a. patient education, drawing blood, and negotiating leases.
 - b. taking vital signs and prescribing medicine.
 - c. assisting the doctor during exams, performing diagnostic tests, and sterilizing medical instruments.
 - d. performing ECGs, infection control, and billing and coding.
- 3. The personal qualifications of a medical assistant are
 - a. great clinical and administrative skills.
 - b. attentiveness to detail, professionalism, diplomacy, and empathy.
 - c. the ability to expand your career opportunities.
 - d. graduating from an accredited school.
- 4. The main purpose of the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) is to
 - a. raise the standards of professionalism.
 - b. assist with malpractice lawsuits.

Discussion Questions

- 1. Why are more employers recruiting credentialed medical assistants?
- 2. Explain the importance of continuing education for medical assistants.
- 3. What is the purpose of the AAMA Occupational Analysis?
- 4. Discuss why volunteer work will enhance a medical assistant's career.

Critical Thinking Questions

- 1. Describe an effective medical assistant, and explain two ways a new medical assistant may learn to be an efficient and effective employee.
- 2. How will the "aging boom" affect health care and the profession of medical assisting in the future?
- 3. What is a self-directed, lifelong learner? How can a medical assistant achieve this goal?
- 4. Why is it important to stay current on changes in technology and health care?

Application Activities

1. With a partner, pick one of the following two situations. Without showing your partner, write a description of how you would display the personal attribute stated at the end of the scenario. After you and your partner have written your descriptions, compare them with each other.

Patient Situation

Patient says: "I have such a horrible headache. I've been feeling tired lately too."

Attribute You Wish to Display

Empathy

Patient Situation

Doctor: "I'm really backed up on paperwork. Could you come in an hour early tomorrow morning to help me organize it? You will be paid for the overtime."

Attribute You Wish to Display

Flexibility

2. Chose a mentor who displays the personal attributes listed in this chapter and write a few sentences to explain why these attributes apply to her or him.
3. A. Think of all the personal qualifications you possess. List those that will help you as a medical assistant.

- B. List all of the personal qualifications you need to develop or improve in order to work successfully in the career of medical assisting.
- C. Describe the actions you will take to acquire the personal qualifications to become a multiskilled medical assistant.



Visit the McGraw-Hill Higher Education Medical Assisting website at www.mhhe.com/medicalassisting4e to complete the following activity:

Prepare an oral presentation regarding topics such as certification examinations, scope of practice, or accreditation agencies such as ABHES or CAAHEP. Prepare a report using a specified number of references and citations and present your report to the class. Schedule the presentations throughout the course and use available multimedia such as PowerPoint slides or an overhead projector for the student presentations. Visit the websites of The American Association of Medical Assistants or American Medical Technologists for possible report topics.



Open the CD and complete this chapter's practice activities, play the games, listen to the key terms, and test yourself with the interactive review. E-mail, print, and/or save your results to document your proficiency.