

Medical Assistant

Medical assisting is a multi-skilled allied health profession; practitioners work primarily in ambulatory settings such as medical offices and clinics. Medical assistants function as members of the health care delivery team and perform administrative and clinical procedures.



History

Since its founding in 1956, the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) has been the only professional association devoted exclusively to the profession of medical assisting. The AAMA holds an important role in improving the educational preparation and continuing education opportunities for the medical assistant.

The first certification examination was administered in 1963, preceding the establishment of the accreditation program. In 1966, the AAMA began work on formal curriculum standards in collaboration with the AMA; standards were subsequently adopted in 1969. The most recent version of the *Standards* was completed in 2008.



Career Description

Medical assistants work under the supervision of physicians in their offices or other medical settings. In accordance with respective state laws, they perform a broad range of administrative and clinical duties:

Administrative Duties

- Scheduling and receiving patients
- Preparing and maintaining medical records
- Performing basic secretarial skills and medical transcription
- Handling telephone calls and writing correspondence
- Serving as a liaison between the physician and other individuals
- Managing practice finances

Clinical Duties

- Asepsis and infection control
- Taking patient histories and vital signs
- Performing first aid and CPR
- Preparing patients for procedures
- Assisting the physician with examinations and treatments
- Collecting and processing specimens
- Performing selected diagnostic tests
- Preparing and administering medications as directed by the physician

Both administrative and clinical duties involve maintenance of equipment and supplies for the practice. A medical assistant who is sufficiently qualified by education and/or experience may be responsible for supervising personnel, developing and conducting public outreach programs to market the physician's professional services, and participating in the negotiation of leases and of equipment and supply contracts.



Employment Characteristics

More medical assistants are employed by practicing physicians than any other type of allied health personnel. Medical assistants are usually employed in physicians' offices and other ambulatory healthcare settings, where they

perform a variety of administrative and clinical tasks to facilitate the work of the physician. The responsibilities of medical assistants vary, depending on whether they work in a clinic, hospital, large group practice, or small private office. With demand from more than 200,000 physicians, there are, and will probably continue to be, almost unlimited opportunities for formally educated medical assistants.



Salary

According to the AAMA, the average entry-level salary for Certified Medical Assistants (CMAs) in 2004 was \$22,650. The average annual salary for full-time practitioners with a CMA was \$27,951. For more information, refer to www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.



Educational Programs

Length. Programs grant an associates degree, certificate, or diploma.

Prerequisites. High school diploma or equivalent is usually required.

Curriculum. The curricula of accredited programs must ensure achievement of the *Entry-Level Competencies for the Medical Assistant*. The curriculum must include anatomy and physiology, medical terminology, medical law and ethics, psychology, communications (oral and written), medical assisting administrative procedures, and medical assisting clinical procedures. Programs must include an externship that provides practical experience in qualified physicians' offices, accredited hospitals, or other health care facilities.



Inquiries

Careers

American Association of Medical Assistants
20 North Wacker Drive, Suite 1575
Chicago, IL 60606-2903
800 228-2262
312 899-1500
www.aama-ntl.org

Certification/Registration

Director of Certification
American Association of Medical Assistants
20 North Wacker Drive, Suite 1575
Chicago, IL 60606-2903
312 424-3100

American Medical Technologists
710 Higgins Road
Park Ridge, IL 60068-5765
847 823-5169
E-mail: amtmail@aol.com
www.amt1.com

Program Accreditation

Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs
(CAAHEP) in collaboration with:
American Association of Medical Assistants Endowment
20 North Wacker Drive, Suite 1575

Chicago, IL 60606-2963
312 899-1500
312 899-1259 Fax
E-mail: accreditation@aama-ntl.org