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Education Today / Career Tomorrow

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Medical Assistant

Administrative and clinical tasks are the staples of the medical assisting profession. They are employed by hospitals, clinics, and a variety of health care practitioners to keep office and clinical functions running smoothly.

Duties vary according to location, size, and specialty. Medical assistants usually work as "generalists" at smaller practices, dealing with both administrative and minor clinical duties. Typically they report to an office manager, physician, or other health care practitioner. Those employed by larger practices or hospitals generally specialize in a particular area, such as ophthalmology or dermatology.

Administrative duties generally include answering telephones, greeting patients, updating and filing patient records, completing insurance forms, handling correspondence, scheduling appointments, arranging hospital

admissions and laboratory services, and dealing with billing and bookkeeping. They may also purchase and maintain supplies and equipment.

Clinical duties are specified according to state law. They may include recording medical histories and vital signs, describing treatment procedures to patients, preparing patients for examination, and assisting physicians during exams.

Medical assistants also may collect and prepare lab specimens or perform basic laboratory tests on premises. They may dispose of contaminated supplies and sterilize medical equipment. They prepare and administer medications as directed by a physician, authorize drug refills as directed, telephone prescriptions to pharmacies, draw blood, prepare patients for X-rays, administer electrocardiograms, remove sutures, and replace dressings. They

also maintain, clean, and organize waiting and exam rooms.

Some medical assistants specialize in a particular area. For instance, podiatric medical assistants make castings of patients' feet, take and develop X-rays, and assist podiatrists in surgery. Ophthalmic medical assistants provide basic eye care, such as measuring and recording vision, testing eye muscle function, and conducting diagnostic tests. They may also demonstrate how to insert, remove, and care for contact lenses, and maintain optical and surgical equipment.

Professional certifications exist for medical assistants working in a variety of fields. There is no licensing required for medical assistants. However, some states may require assistants to pass a test or course before an they can perform certain tasks, such as taking X-rays or drawing blood.

Job Outlook

Job opportunities for medical assistants are expected to grow faster than average through 2010 as the health services industry expands due to technological advances in medicine, plus a growing and aging population. In general, medical assisting is considered one of the fastest growing occupations.

Money Matters

Job description: Assists with routine clerical and clinical duties as determined by a physician.

Salary: \$19,000-\$32,000

Education Needed

Most employers of medical assistants prefer to hire graduates of formal medical assisting programs. Formal training and education for medical assistants usually takes one year to complete at a technical college, while an associate degree requires two years of study.

Most medical assisting programs consist of both medical and administrative courses, including anatomy and physiology, medical terminology, typing, transcription, record keeping, and insurance processing. Laboratory techniques, clinical and diagnostic procedures, pharmaceutical principles, medication administration, and first aid are also covered. Accredited programs usually require an internship in a physician's office, hospital, or other health care facility. Experienced workers fare the best in obtaining employment, as do certified applicants who have passed a national exam. Such exams include the Certified Medical Assistant credential, awarded by the American Association of Medical Assistants and the Registered Medical Assistant and credential, awarded by the American Medical Technologists.

Resources

ONLINE:

- www.aama-ntl.org
(The American Association Of Medical Assistants)
- www.abhes.org
(Accrediting Bureau Of Health Education Schools)

GENERAL:

Registered Medical Assistants Of American Medical Technologists
 710 Higgins Rd.
 Park Ridge, IL 60068-5765

LOCAL:

Career Counselor, Ronai Krugh
 941-752-8100 ext. 242

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