EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MEDICAL ASSISTING
NATURE OF WORK

Unlike physician assistants who examine, diagnose, and treat patients, medical assistants perform administrative and clinical tasks to ensure the office is running smoothly. Medical assistants may work in the offices of physicians, podiatrists, chiropractors, dermatologists or other health care facilities [1].

Administrative medical assistant jobs include answering telephones, greeting patients, scheduling appointments, and performing other bookkeeping responsibilities. Other tasks include updating patients’ medical records, filling out insurance forms, and organizing laboratory services and hospital admissions. They also keep doctors on schedule throughout the day.

Clinical medical assistant tasks vary from state to state. However, most tasks include taking medical histories, recording vital signs, explaining treatment procedures to patients, assisting physicians during examinations, changing dressings, drawing blood, preparing patients for x-rays, taking electrocardiograms, and removing sutures. Clinical medical assistants may also talk to patients about medications and special diets [1].

TRAINING & CERTIFICATION

In order to become a medical assistant, you need to have a diploma from high school. Some medical assistants are trained on the job; however, those who complete a training program will get better pay and better job prospects. Nowadays, most medical assistants must have a postsecondary diploma or certification.

There are various vocational schools, junior colleges, and community colleges that offer postsecondary medical assisting programs. These programs help prepare you with everything you need to know about the field.

Employers often hire those with certificates over those without. Getting certified in medical is necessary to gain the best position. There are various organizations that award certification to medical assistants. Among those the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCCA) and the American Association of

QUICK FACTS

- Medical Assistants assure the day-to-day office operations, and see that all tasks are being handled appropriately. They welcome patients and support the doctor to keep the work flow going. They also complete patients’ medical records, take vital signs, educated them on methods to improve health, and teach them how to take medications.
- The average annual salary is $44,000.
- Employment is expected to grow 35% in the next five years.
- A high school diploma is all that is required to begin.
- Training takes between 1 and 2 years.
- You can apply now to start training in this exciting field.
Medical Assistants (AAMA) are the most well known. It is also possible to be certified in a specialized area of medical assisting such as podiatry, optometry, or ophthalmology.

There are two certificates that are the most recognized: the CMA and RMA.

The CMA, or Certified Medical Assistant, is usually given by the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA). It is given only after an accredited program in medical assisting is completed. In order to gain the CMA, aspiring medical assistants must pass a rigorous examination to test their knowledge and understanding of health care delivery.

Those who get a CMA must renew their credential every five years. This ensures that those possessing a CMA are current with the new procedures.

The RMA, or Registered Medical Assistant, is given by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCCA). In order to receive an RMA, a person must either be a recent graduate of an accredited medical assisting program or have been employed as a medical assistant for a minimum of five years.

For those who gain an RMA, they are required to renew it every three years.

**EDUCATION**

You can complete education in medical assisting online or in a classroom setting. Regardless of whether you complete courses online or in a classroom, classes cover the same topics:

- Anatomy, physiology, medical terminology
- Typing, transcription, recordkeeping, accounting, insurance processing
- Office practices, patient relations, medical law and ethics
- Most accredited programs include an internship or externship to provide you with practical experience before you begin full time.

**Online Learning**

For those of you with hectic lifestyles or no time to attend class, online courses in medical billing and coding may be for you. There are a vast amount of programs that offer online courses with the
convenience of taking them where you want, when you want, and at what speed you want.

In an online program you will still cover the same material that you would in a classroom. You even have the convenience of interacting with instructors and peers via discussion and message boards, but from the comfort of your own home.

Online courses consist of reading, listening to, or viewing lectures, participating in class discussion via message boards and life chat sessions, and completing assignment and exams submitted online.

After you have successfully completed an online program and receive certification, it will be the same certification you would have received in a classroom setting \(^4\).

**Education Timeline**

Training can last between one and two years.

For those involved in one year programs, you will earn a diploma or certificate, which usually only takes about nine months to a year to complete. Both community and career colleges offer 1 year programs, however, career college programs are generally faster.

For those in a two year program, you will earn your associate’s degree. If you are planning to get more education later on, an associate’s degree is the way to go as it will give you credit towards earning a bachelor’s degree.

**Scholarships**

There are many scholarships offered by health societies. There are many organizations that give scholarship money based on the field of study you go into, not your academic talent. The American Medical Technologists (AMT) is an example of an organization that offers great scholarships.

You may also qualify for Federal aid. The most common types of student loans and financial aid are the Pell grant \(^4\), Stafford Loans \(^5\), and PLUS Loans \(^6\).
Accreditation

When choosing a school, make sure that the medical assisting training program is accredited by either:

- Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP)
- Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES)

EMPLOYMENT

Medical assistants work in clean environments. They are constantly interacting with other people, whether it be patients, doctors, nurses, or family members of patients. They typically work 40-hour weeks, which may include some weekends. Work schedules are often flexible and great fringe benefits are usually offered.

JOB OUTLOOK

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, jobs in medical assisting are projected to increase 35% in the next five years. With the advances of medical treatments, people are living longer lives, thus requiring more medical attention and jobs in the field [1].

Job prospects are excellent. There are opportunities to work as a medical assistant throughout the entire country.

JOB UPLOOK

Although many work as medical assistants their entire career, there is job growth within this field. Without additional training medical assistants may move into management or administrative positions. With the appropriate training, medical assistants can start in other medical careers such as nursing or health care. Some medical assistants go on to teach medical assisting [1].
EARNINGS

Medical assistants currently earn an average annual salary of $30,000[^7]. However, they can make more based on their education, training, skills, experience, job type, and job location. They also receive fringe benefits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Earnings by Education[^8]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>$20,695–$32,308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–4 years</td>
<td>$20,701–$30,104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–9 years</td>
<td>$24,672–$35,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–19 years</td>
<td>$24,658–$35,212</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 years or more</td>
<td>$28,072–$37,581</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average earnings by Years of Experience[^9]</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HS Graduate</td>
<td>$28,307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate's Degree</td>
<td>$36,392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>$50,056</td>
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<tr>
<td>Master's Degree</td>
<td>$63,220</td>
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GETTING STARTED

Apply today and let us help to match you with the perfect program that fit your needs and lifestyle. Medical assisting is a great career to get involved in with endless possibilities.
Links:

http://aama-ntl.org/resources/library/OA.pdf
http://www.staffloan.com/
http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/parentloans.jsp

References


