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A medical assistant, also known as a "clinical assistant" or healthcare assistant in the US,[1] is an allied health professional who supports the work of physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants and other health professionals, usually in a clinic setting. Medical assistants can become certified through an accredited program.[2][3] Medical assistants perform routine tasks and procedures in a medical clinic. A "medical assistant" may be certified or registered, or may be a loosely defined group (covering related occupational titles such as "medical office assistant", "clinical assistant", "assistant medical officer", or "ophthalmic assistant"). The occupation should not be confused with physician assistants, who are licensed professionals trained to practice medicine and perform surgical procedures in collaboration with a physician. Medical assistants perform routine clinical and administrative duties under the direct supervision of a physician or other health care professional. Medical assistants perform many administrative duties, including answering telephones, greeting patients, updating and filing patients' medical records, filling out insurance forms, handling correspondence, scheduling appointments, arranging for hospital admission and laboratory services, performing some quasi-secretarial duties, and handling billing and book keeping. Duties vary according to laws of the jurisdiction and may include taking medical histories and recording vital signs, explaining treatment procedures to patients, preparing patients for examination, and assisting during diagnostic examinations. Medical assistants collect and prepare laboratory specimens or perform basic laboratory tests on the premises, dispose of contaminated supplies, and sterilize medical instruments. They instruct patients about medications and special diets, prepare and administer medications as directed, authorize drug refills as directed, telephone prescriptions to a pharmacy, draw blood, prepare patients for X-rays, take electrocardiograms, remove sutures, and change dressings. They also facilitate communication between the patient and other health care professionals.[4] Some jurisdictions allow medical assistants to perform more advanced procedures, such as giving injections or taking X-rays, after passing a test or taking a course. According to the International Standard Classification of Occupations, medical assistants normally require formal training in health services provision for competent performance in their jobs. Formal education usually occurs in post-secondary institutions such as vocational schools, technical institutes, community colleges, proprietary colleges, online educational programs or junior colleges. Medical assistant training programs most commonly lead to a certificate or a diploma, which take around one year to complete, or an associate degree, which takes around two years. Study topics include medical terminology, anatomy and physiology, and programs may include a clinical internship, sometimes referred to as "externship", wherein the student works as a medical assistant in a medical clinic.[5] In Bangladesh, medical assistants are known as Sub Assistant Community Medical Officer (SACMO). They complete Diploma in Medical Faculty (DMF) course of 4.5 years duration (4 years academic + 6 months internship) from The State Medical Faculty of Bangladesh. In this academic year they study Basic Anatomy, Basic Pathology and Microbiology, Basic Pharmacology, Basic Medicine and Paediatrics, Basic Surgery, Basic Gynecology and Obstetrics, Basic Community Medicine and Health Management, and other medical subjects. According to the BMDC ACT 2010, they practice independently with 73 drugs. And in the govt hospital they work under a Medical officer. [6] They play an important role in providing medical services in upazila health complexes and remote areas. Medical assistants are produced by Medical Assistants Training School (MATS).They are allowed to prescribe 73 type of basic medicine and also allowed perform abscess drainage, stitch and midwifery practice under the direct supervision of a physician.[7] They get registration from bangladesh Medical and Dental Council as a medical assistant practitioner. [8] In Canada, medical assistants typically complete an educational program that prepares them to perform special assisting and secretarial duties for physicians, dentists, nurses, health care facilities, and other health service providers. Instructional programs include courses in business and medical communications, medical terminology, principles of health care operations, public relations and interpersonal communications, software applications, record-keeping and filing systems, scheduling and filing systems, policies and regulations, and professional standards and ethics.[9] Medical assistant job responsibilities vary depending on the nature and size of the health care facility where the individual works, but typically involve multiple administrative duties such as scheduling appointments, handling private medical documents, and assisting patients with the admissions process. In Malaysia, medical assistants are known as Assistant Medical Officers (AMO).[10] They complete a three-and-a-half-year diploma in medical assistant (DMA) undergraduate program recognized by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency. They work independently or with limited supervision of a physician to provide healthcare services to largely underserved populations.[11] The occupation is more similar to that of clinical officers in Tanzania and elsewhere. In the United States, medical assistants have traditionally held jobs almost exclusively in ambulatory care centers, urgent care facilities, and clinics, but this is now changing. Medical assistants now find employment in both private and public hospitals, inpatient and outpatient facilities, as well as assisted living facilities, administrative and clinical settings, or general practice and specialty doctor's offices.[2] According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2014-15 Edition, employment of medical assistants is expected to grow by 29%, much faster than the average for all occupations through 2022.[12] The New America Foundation has criticized medical assistant programs, particularly those run by profit-making schools like Kaplan and Everest College. Some graduates of the school cannot find full-time work, or cannot find work at all, cannot make enough to pay their loans, and go into default.[13] According to the Department of Labor, median annual salary for medical assistants in 2011 was \$29,100, but students with medical-assistant certificates typically earned less than \$20,000. In some programs, graduates earned less than \$15,000, the minimum wage, which means they were working part-time. For example, Drake College of Business, Elizabeth, NJ, charges \$18,000, but 31% of graduates defaulted on loans. A few public community colleges where graduates make more than \$25,000 a year.[14] According to the US Bureau Of Labor Statistics the median average wage for medical assistants in 2024 is \$44,200. [15] In the U.S., an institution's medical assisting program may be credited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) or the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES) if its graduates plan to become certified or registered. Accreditation is a requirement of certification agencies such as the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA), the American Medical Technologists (AMT) and the National Health Career Association (NHA).[16] Currently there are in excess of 600 CAAHEP accredited programs in more than 500 institutions,[17] and more than 200 accredited by ABHES.[18] Accreditation by CAAHEP, ABHES or other accreditation associations requires that the institution's medical assisting program meets specific educational standards and provides sufficient classroom, lecture, and laboratory time. Professional certification is a way to measure competency of a medical assistant at an entry-level job. Certification for medical assistants is voluntary and optional, though encouraged by the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) and a number of other certification bodies. Employers increasingly prefer or even require that the medical assistants they hire be certified.[19] In the United States, different organizations certify medical assistants.[20] For one, the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) was founded in 1956. Certification may be achieved by taking the CMA (AAMA) Certification Examination offered by the AAMA Certifying Board in consultation with the National Board of Medical Examiners, which also administers many national exams for physicians.[21] The CMA (AAMA) exam is offered throughout the year at computer-based testing centers across the country.[22] Only individuals who have successfully completed a CAAHEP or ABHES accredited medical assisting program are eligible for the CMA (AAMA) Certification Examination [23] Those who successfully complete the CMA (AAMA) Certification Examination earn the CMA (AAMA) credential, a title which then follows postnominally. A CMA (AAMA) must re-certify every 60 months by continuing education[24] or re-examination[21] in order to maintain certification. Other credential options include becoming a registered medical assistant (RMA). Credentialing is voluntary. The American Medical Technologists (AMT) agency is responsible for certifying MAS who choose this course.[25] The AMT first began offering this certification in 1972.[26] AMT has its own conventions and committees, bylaws, state chapters, officers, registrations, and re validation examinations. To become eligible to hold the title of RMA, a student must either pass a medical assisting curriculum at a school that accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), or possess a minimum of five years experience. The National Center for Competency Testing (NCCT) is an independent credentialing organization that has administered more than 400,000 certification exams across the United States since 1989. Its National Certified Medical Assistant certification program has earned accreditation by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). Candidates who meet all medical assistant eligibility requirements and pass the NCCT national certification examination earn the credential NCMA (NCCT). NCCT accepts candidates from approved medical assistant programs in colleges/universities and provides additional experiential-based qualifying routes. Once certified, the NCMA (NCCT) must complete 14 clock hours of continuing education annually to maintain the credential.[27][28] Assistant Medical Officer Hospital Corpsman Medical Assistant (Royal Navy) ^ "Healthcare assistant". Health Careers. National Health Service. 26 March 2015. Retrieved 16 December 2018. ^ a b BLS. Medical assistants. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 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Retrieved on 2007-03-23 ^ "Your Path to becoming a Medical Assistant". National Center for Competency Testing. ^ National Certified Medical Assistant Archived 2010-12-28 at the Wayback Machine. National Center for Competency Testing. U.S. Medical Assistant Guide U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Retrieved from ^ If you want to pass the CMA in your first attempt, you will need to put a lot of time in and study. One of the best ways to study is by taking free practice tests.Our free practice tests will help you learn the material in an efficient way. You can use the answer explanations to help better understand important concepts. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), medical assistants are the backbone of medical facilities since they perform administrative and clinical tasks required to care for patients. Medical assistants play a vital role in the healthcare industry, providing services for both medical professionals and patients. They can assist with basic medical tasks such as taking vital signs, administering medications per a physician's orders, or gathering medical history. They also help on the office side of medical clinics by scheduling appointments, billing insurance, and processing paperwork. Becoming a medical assistant can be a much quicker path than pursuing a medical degree or nursing degree. Generally, those pursuing a nursing degree must complete at least four years of postsecondary school, while doctors complete 12 or more years to receive their medical degree. Medical assistants, however, only need to earn a high school diploma, and in some cases, they complete a medical assistant program to become certified medical assistants (CMAs). Much of the training to become a medical assistant can actually take place through on-the-job training. This is a rapidly growing career. The BLS (2022) reported that positions in this field would increase 17 percent between 2021 and 2031, adding 117,800 jobs nationwide. Wages for this field vary based on place of employment, years of experience, education completed, and certifications held. On average, the 727,760 medical assistants working in the US earn \$38,190 per year (BLS May 2021). Overall, many find a career as a medical assistant to be extremely rewarding. For those considering pursuing a future in this field, it is important to fully understand all aspects of the medical assistant's role. This guide provides a general overview of the medical assistant career, exploring the scope of work, specializations, common employers, work environment, and certification and licensure. Medical assistants perform administrative and clinical tasks in various healthcare-related locations, providing professional assistance to healthcare personnel. Medical assistants may be responsible for various tasks based on location, employer, and several other factors. According to the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA), some typical duties include taking patients' vital signs, as well as recording patient health histories and any relevant personal information. Clinical medical assistants may also administer injections and prepare blood or other samples for testing, whereas administrative medical assistants will utilize patient information to create medical records. It is important to note that medical assistants should not be confused with physician assistants, who have different roles in the healthcare industry. Comparatively, physician assistants—unlike medical assistants—have the ability to diagnose and treat patients under the supervision of a physician. Medical assistants have a more limited scope of practice, focusing instead on more administrative and basic clinical tasks. Medical assistants can select a specialty if they work in a larger medical facility or are employed by a specialty clinic. Specialization may allow for greater efficiency in the workplace as medical assistants focus their entire practice on one area. The following list outlines common areas of specialization for medical assistants: Clinical Medical Assistants Clinical medical assistants may perform basic tests in a laboratory, sterilize medical equipment, and even dispose of medical supplies that have been contaminated. In some cases, these individuals may have additional duties such as preparing patients for x-ray procedures, drawing blood, or even removing sutches when necessary. Administrative Medical Assistants On the other hand, administrative medical assistants manage the administrative tasks within a healthcare facility. This may include recording patient information, filling out insurance forms, scheduling patient appointments, and even answering phone calls to schedule patients or provide test results. Obstetric Medical Assistants Obstetric medical assistants work specifically in the office of an obstetrician. They work closely with obstetricians and other medical personnel within the department of obstetrics and gynecology, often helping with breast exams and minor obstetric surgery, and even caring for pregnant women who visit the office. Ophthalmologic Medical Assistants Ophthalmologic medical assistants help ophthalmologists—i.e., those whose practice focuses specifically on treating their patient's eyes. These medical assistants may administer eye medication or, on occasion, even help with minor eye surgery. While the responsibilities of medical assistants may vary, the most general day-to-day tasks below are outlined according to the medical assistant's specialty. Those working in a clinical setting may be required to: Draw blood from patients Prepare samples for testing in a laboratory Measure any required vital signs, as requested by the treating physician Give patients injections or prepare them for x-rays Take electrocardiograms Change wound dressings or remove stitches Conduct basic lab tests on specimens Educate patients on administering medications according to physician specifications Explain general treatment procedures to patients or families Assist the treating physician in any other way necessary By contrast, those who have an administrative focus can expect to: Schedule patient examinations, appointments, and follow-ups, if necessary Answer the phone and take messages for the medical staff Enter patient information into medical records according to the proper procedures and codes Record any patient medical history and personal information Perform any other administrative tasks required by other healthcare personnel Great patients Code and complete insurance forms Call affiliate facilities to arrange admissions or diagnostic services Perform bookkeeping Naturally, the day-to-day tasks of a medical assistant will vary depending on several other factors, including their place of employment. For example, an obstetric medical assistant may need to assist the obstetrician with caring for pregnant women or administering breast exams. In contrast, a chiropractic medical assistant may help the treating doctor with various chiropractic treatments. Because the responsibilities of a medical assistant differ by specialty, those pursuing a career in this field should ultimately be prepared to take on any tasks requested by the healthcare staff to whom they are providing assistance. The pace of work for a medical assistant can vary widely. Some work environments can be extremely fast-paced, while others can be relatively moderate or even slow, depending on where the individual works. Clinical medical assistants in a public hospital may be on their feet throughout the shift, constantly performing tasks required by healthcare personnel. The stress of this type of work environment can be further compounded if the hospital is a central hub within the area and receives patients consistently. On the other hand, an administrative medical assistant in a small, private clinic may have a much less arduous routine. Medical assistants who work in emergency care facilities open 24/7 may be asked to work various full-time shifts, including nights, weekends, and holidays. However, those who work in smaller, specialty clinics may work a more traditional full-time shift (e.g., 8 am to 5 pm, Monday through Friday). While others, especially those in a clinical setting, may instead work three 12-hour shifts each week, with the possibility of additional overtime. Kimmy Gustafson Writer With her passion for uncovering the latest innovations and trends, Kimmy Gustafson has provided valuable insights and has interviewed experts to provide readers with the latest information in the rapidly evolving field of medical technology since 2019. Kimmy has been a freelance writer for more than a decade, writing hundreds of articles on a wide variety of topics such as startups, nonprofits, healthcare, kiteboarding, the outdoors, and higher education. She is passionate about seeing the world and has traveled to over 27 countries. She holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Oregon. When not working she can be found outdoors, parenting, kiteboarding, or cooking. If you want to pass the RMA in your first attempt, you will need to put a lot of time in and study. One of the best ways to study is by taking free practice tests.Our practice exams will help you learn the material in an efficient way. Make sure to review the answer explanations to learn difficult concepts.