Case Study: Salud Family Health Centers

Expanded Roles and Opportunities for Medical Assistants in Integrated Health

By taking continuing education classes and working through a ladders program, medical assistants at Salud Family Health Centers can choose from an array of career paths that lead to increased responsibility, greater pay and leadership opportunities.

“The great thing about Salud is that medical assistants are not limited to serving as traditional medical assistants,” says Alma Van Egmond, Education and Lab Administrator at Salud. Many of the managers at Salud started as medical assistants and have remained at Salud for years. Van Egmond started her own career at Salud 27 years ago as a medical assistant and now works with the medical support staff assisting with credentialing. Van Egmond was first introduced to Salud as a young child when her family received their primary health care at the clinic.

Salud is a Federally Qualified Health Center operating 12 clinic locations and a mobile unit in northern Colorado. Salud offers comprehensive primary medical care, which includes integrated dental, pharmacy and behavioral health services. When it opened in 1970, Salud provided health services to migrant workers in the surrounding agricultural areas. To this day, Salud’s mobile unit continues to provide medical care to people who lack access to care.

“Medical assistants have been a part of Salud since day one,” Van Egmond said. Of Salud’s 700 employees, more than 100 are medical assistants. Salud requires medical assistants to become certified within their first year of employment. While Salud accepts certification from a few certification agencies, the majority employed at Salud are certified by AMT.

Salud employees reflect the many different cultures that are represented across Northern Colorado. “Most of our medical assistants are homegrown,” said Danielle Langley, Salud’s Operations Manager. “They know the patients and the area and the culture. They’re dedicated from the beginning.”

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Alma Van Egmond
Education and Lab Administrator

Most medical assistants at Salud work to provide direct patient care alongside the medical team of physicians, physician assistants, behavioral health providers and nurse practitioners. With experience and additional education and training, medical assistants can also become lab leads, immunization leads, front desk leads, OB coordinators and enrollment specialists. “We have a learning management system and a ladders program that medical assistants can work through to achieve goals,” Van Egmond said. “It gives people an opportunity to progress.”
When medical assistants become leads, they assume more responsibility for interacting with patients on test results, referrals and insurance information. Some work on Salud’s quality initiatives.

Langley said that working at Salud is considered important and prestigious throughout the communities that Salud serves; the public sees the strong community support that Salud demonstrates. “People see that we offer quality services. Medical assistants help us take care of our patients and ‘be there’ for patients,” Langley said.

Salud Family Health Centers is a Federally Qualified Health Center treating over 74,000 patients annually at 13 locations in nine communities throughout northern Colorado. Salud employs over 500 people to provide medical, dental, pharmacy and behavioral health care services.