

Profession Profile: Medical Assistant



AMT
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Certifying Excellence in Allied Health

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A medical assistant is an integral member of the health care delivery team, qualified by education and experience to work in physician's offices, the administrative office, the examining room and the physician office laboratory. The medical assistant, often a liaison between the doctor and the patient, is of vital importance to the success of the medical practice.

Duties

Medical assistants complete administrative and clinical tasks in the offices of physicians, podiatrists, chiropractors and other health practitioners. Their duties vary with the location, specialty and size of the practice. Medical assistants typically do the following:

- Record patient history and personal information
- Measure vital signs, such as blood pressure
- Help the physician with patient examinations
- Give patients injections or medications as directed by the physician and as permitted by state law
- Schedule patient appointments
- Prepare blood samples for laboratory tests
- Enter patient information into medical records



Education and Training

Most employers prefer medical assistants who graduated from an accredited medical assisting program. Accredited medical assisting programs are offered in postsecondary vocational schools, community colleges and in colleges and universities. Post-secondary programs usually last either one year or less, which results in a certificate or diploma, or two years with an associate degree. Most accredited programs include an internship that provides practical experience in a hospital, healthcare facility or physicians' office. Formal training is not mandatory but recommended. Some medical assistants learn their skills through on-the-job training. Some high schools even offer courses covering necessary topics, and along with volunteer work in a health care setting can provide enough education to begin a career in medical assisting.

Choosing an Accredited Program

Accredited Programs: It is a good choice to choose a school program that is accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

Certification/Licensing: Medical assistants are not required to be certified in most states. However, employers prefer to hire certified assistants. Several organizations offer certification. An applicant must pass an exam and have taken one of several routes to be eligible for each certification. These routes include graduation from an accredited program and work experience, among others. In most cases, an applicant must be at least 18 years old before applying for certification. Some states may require assistants to graduate from an accredited program, pass an exam or both, to practice. Contact the state board of medicine for more information.

Advancement: Medical assistants are able to advance to office manager or a variety of administrative duties and may teach medical assisting courses after a number of years of experience. Many medical assistants return to school for more education to become nurses, medical laboratory technicians, medical technologists or enter into other health related occupations. Some medical assistants also certify as phlebotomy technicians and medical administrative specialists in addition to their medical assisting certification.

Is It Right For You?

Medical assistants must be able to understand and follow medical charts and diagnoses on paper charts or electronic health records. Medical assistants should be able to use basic clinical instruments so they can take a patient's vital signs, such as heart rate and blood pressure. They need to be precise when taking vital signs or recording patient information and be able to keep that information confidential and discuss it only with other medical personnel who are involved in treating the patient. They often interact with patients who may be in pain or in distress, so they need to be able to act in a calm and professional manner.

Employment

Medical assistants held about 591,300 jobs in 2014. These assistants can work in healthcare facilities and more than half hold jobs in physicians' offices. Employment is expected to grow by 23 percent from 2014 to 2024, much faster than the average for all occupations. Demand will stem from physicians hiring more medical assistants to do routine administrative and clinical duties so that physicians can see more patients. The growth of the aging baby-boom population will continue to spur demand for preventive medical services, which are often provided by physicians. As their practices expand, physicians will hire more assistants to perform routine administrative and clinical duties, allowing the physicians to see more patients. Assistants will likely continue to be used in place of more expensive workers, such as nurses, to reduce costs.

Salary

The earnings of medical assistants vary, depending on their experience, skill level, and location. Median annual earnings of medical assistants were \$31,540 in May 2016. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$22,870, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$45,310.

Want To Learn More?

Visit the US Bureau of Labor Statistics:

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/medical-assistants.htm>