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What is a medical assistant?

A medical assistant (MA) is an unlicensed person who assists in the medical practice under the supervision of a physician, physician assistant or nurse practitioner and performs delegated procedures commensurate with the MA's education and training. An MA does not diagnose, interpret, design or modify established treatment programs or perform any functions that would violate any statute applicable to the practice of medicine.

What kind of training is required of a medical assistant?

Medical assistants are not licensed in Arizona and certification is not required. (To become certified, a medical assistant must successfully pass a certification exam.) In order to work as a medical assistant, a person must complete an approved training program. This is a program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP), the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES), a medical assisting program accredited by any accrediting agency recognized by the United States Department of Education, or a medical assisting program designed and offered by a licensed allopathic physician, that meets or exceeds any of these three accrediting programs, and verifies the entry level competencies of a medical assistant.

- CAAHEP has a website, www.caahep.org where information on medical assistants can be downloaded. Click on Standards and Guidelines, and then click on Medical Assistants. The document includes a curriculum for medical assistant training. **This is a good resource for physicians to use when training a medical assistant.**

It is up to the physician, physician assistant or nurse practitioner employing the medical assistant to verify that all training requirements are met. An MA does not need to provide the Board with a certificate of completion. The Board does not provide any information verifying training completion.

Are there any exceptions to the medical assistant training requirements?

There are three conditions under which a medical assistant does not need to complete an approved training program:

- A medical assistant who completed an unapproved medical assistant training program prior to February 2000 and was employed as a medical assistant since completion of the program does not need to complete an approved training program.
- A person who worked as a medical assistant for the same physician, group of physicians or physician assistant for at least 2000 hours prior to February 2000, does not need to complete an approved training program.
- A person who completes a medical services training program of the Armed Forces of the United States does not need to complete an approved training program.

What are the typical tasks a medical assistant can perform?

The procedures a medical assistant may perform are outlined in statute (A.R.S. §32-1456) and in Rule (R4-16-401 through R4-16-403). Both statute and Rule establish which procedures can be performed under direct supervision of an MD, PA or nurse practitioner and which procedures can be performed without direct supervision

*** Please Note:** The procedures an MA may perform under the supervision of an osteopathic physician (D.O.) are different and questions regarding the procedures performed under a D.O. should be referred to the Osteopathic Board.

Some of the procedures a medical assistant may perform under the direct supervision of a physician, physician assistant or nurse practitioner include:

- Taking body fluid specimens
- Administering injections
- Whirlpool treatments
- Diathermy treatments
- Electronic galvanation stimulation treatments
- Ultrasound therapy

Massage therapy

- Traction treatments
- Transcutaneous Nerve Stimulation unit treatments
- Hot and cold pack treatments
- Small volume nebulizer treatments

Some of the procedures a medical assistant may perform without direct supervision include:

- Billing & coding
- Verifying insurance
- Making patient appointments
- Scheduling
- Recording a doctor's findings in patient charts and transcribing materials in patient charts and records
- Performing visual acuity screening as part of a routine physical

A physician, physician assistant or nurse practitioner may delegate other duties to the medical assistant. It is the physician's, physician assistant's or nurse practitioner's duty to ensure the medical assistant is properly trained in all delegated duties.