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CMA (AAMA) certification

Why it is the premier credential

A greater number of employers across the nation are preferring (or even insisting) that their medical assistants be CMAs (AAMA). Employers continue to value the CMA (AAMA) precisely because the credential represents the foremost quality employee in the profession. Advantages of the CMA (AAMA) include the following:

- The CMA (AAMA) is the only certification that limits eligibility to candidates who have completed a postsecondary, *accredited* medical assisting academic

Only individuals who have successfully completed a medical assisting program that has been accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) or by the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES) are eligible to sit for the CMA (AAMA) Certification Examination. No exceptions to the eligibility requirements for the examination are granted.

These two accrediting bodies* provide programmatic accreditation for medical assisting programs, which means that the program itself undergoes rigorous scrutiny and standardized approval processes. Programmatic accreditation is different from institutional accreditation, which evaluates the school as a whole, and not its individual programs.

*Lists of accredited programs in your state may be found on the CAAHEP and ABHES websites.^{5,6}

program. The program must include a clinical practicum of a minimum 160-hour length. Other credentialing bodies permit an individual to take their tests without having any formal medical assisting education. Because hands-on, psychomotor competencies cannot be measured by a paper-and-pencil or computer-based test, the mandatory education and practicum requirement distinguishes the CMA (AAMA) from all other medical assisting credentials. Therefore, employers, patients, malpractice insurance carriers, and third-party accrediting bodies, such as The Joint Commission and the National Committee for Quality Assurance, are provided tangible evidence that CMAs (AAMA) not only are knowledgeable about the multifaceted dimensions of the profession, but also are competent in the clinical and administrative duties required in ambulatory care delivery settings.

- Physicians and other health care providers can be held liable for negligent acts of their medical assistants. In some jurisdictions, physicians can be held liable for “negligent delegation” if they assign tasks to medical assistants who lack necessary competence and knowledge. By employing CMAs (AAMA), employers can present powerful evidence that their hiring and delegation practices meet or exceed the legal standard. This evidence, in turn, can lessen the likelihood of a successful legal action against the delegating providers.
- The Certifying Board (CB) of the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) is the only medical assisting certifying agency that uses the National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) as the consultant for its certification examination. The NBME is also the consultant for the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) and many physician specialty exams. Scoring metrics for the CMA (AAMA) exam are processed by the same professional psychometricians who provide this service for USMLE candidates. As a result, the rigorous CMA (AAMA) Certification Examination is a highly valid and reliable indicator of the knowledge necessary to be a competent medical assistant.
- Because the CMA (AAMA) exam is a high-stakes exam, it is only offered at professional testing centers. These centers provide secure, reliable exam delivery, and thereby lessen the possibility of compromised exam results, which can be a product of other certification exams given at schools and institutions where high-security requirements are not always maintained.
- The AAMA is a national not-for-profit organization devoted solely to the medical assisting profession. The AAMA Certifying Board oversees the CMA (AAMA) exam. You can read about the CB’s mission and core values within the About section of the AAMA website.¹ Some other medical assisting certification bodies are for-profit and certify

several health professions. Some of these medical assistant examinations do not cover the broad range of knowledge and skills that an entry-level medical assistant should possess.

- The AAMA conducts an extensive occupational analysis (OA) of the medical assisting profession approximately every five years. The *CMA (AAMA) Certification/Recertification Examination Content Outline* is revised and updated after each occupational analysis. A report on the latest OA and the resulting Content Outline, which became effective for exams beginning July 15, 2015, can be reviewed on the AAMA website.^{2,3}
- Employers can verify CMA (AAMA) certification status at Employers/Verify CMA (AAMA) Status on the AAMA website.⁴ ♦

Questions? Contact Donald A. Balasa, JD, MBA, at dbalasa@aama-ntl.org, Anna Johnson, CAE, at ajohnson@aama-ntl.org, or call the AAMA at 800/228-2262.

References

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