

Why more employers are hiring CMAs (AAMA)



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The following is an updated version of the original piece. “Why more employers are hiring CMAs” was first published in the January/February 2007 issue of CMA Today and was revised in 2009 and 2018.

Even before the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) adjusted the eligibility requirements for the CMA (AAMA) Certification/Recertification Examination to better meet the human resource needs of the health care environment, more employers of allied health personnel were preferring or even insisting that their medical assistants have the CMA (AAMA) credential. The CMA (AAMA) represents a medical assistant who has been credentialed by the Certifying Board of the American Association of Medical Assistants and has recertified at least every 60 months and thus has kept the CMA (AAMA) current. Understanding why employers are aggressively recruiting CMAs (AAMA) is of the utmost importance for a medical assistant’s entry into and advancement within the allied health workforce.

First of all, the United States continues to be one of the most litigious nations in the world. Disputes that used to be settled by discussion and mediation are now being referred to attorneys and are ending up in courts of law. Lawsuit mania is particularly acute in the world of health care. Patients have come to view health care providers as guarantors of a positive outcome, and any less-than-optimal result often leads to litigation.

Because of this unfortunate state of affairs, health care providers have had to fortify themselves against malpractice suits and other legal perils. Employers of allied health professionals have correctly concluded that having credentialed personnel on staff will lessen the likelihood of a successful legal challenge to the

quality of work of the employee. Thus, in the realm of medical assisting, the CMA (AAMA) credential has become a means of protecting against potential plaintiffs who might seize upon the fact that the employer (whether a physician, a nurse practitioner, a corporation, a group practice, or a clinic) is utilizing unlicensed allied health personnel. (Medical assistants currently are not licensed in most states, although some states require education and/or credentialing as a legal prerequisite for the performance of certain tasks.)

Another major influence dominating the American health care scene is managed care. The cost limitations imposed by managed care organizations (MCOs) are causing mergers and buyouts throughout the nation. Small physician practices are being consolidated or merged into larger providers of health care, and the resulting economies of scale are—supposedly—making the delivery of health care more cost-effective. Human resource directors of MCOs place great faith in professional credentials for their employees (including physicians) and are therefore more likely to establish certification as a mandatory professional designation for medical assistants. All indications are that the managed care revolution has not yet run its course; consequently, the requiring of the CMA (AAMA) credential by employers is likely to accelerate.

In addition to these factors, state and federal laws are making mandatory credentialing for medical assistants a logical next step in the hiring process. As of January 1, 2017, only credentialed medical assistants (in addition to licensed health care professionals) continue to

be permitted to enter medication, laboratory, and diagnostic imaging orders into the computerized provider order entry (CPOE) system and have such entry count toward meeting the meaningful use thresholds under the Medicaid EHR Incentive Program. This requirement is codified in the regulations of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

This CMS requirement scored a victory for the medical assisting profession because it allows for enhanced patient care through better communication among the health care team and increased attention to patient needs. The fact that credentialed medical assistants are now recognized in such a high-profile federal initiative implies that they are just as able as licensed health care professionals to undertake such significant responsibilities. Furthermore, by differentiating credentialed medical assistants from those who are uncredentialed, the CMS places importance on such credentials as the CMA (AAMA).

All in all, the CMA (AAMA) credential is assuming increasing importance in the eyes of all types of employers of medical assistants. By offering the CMA (AAMA) designation to worthy medical assisting candidates, the American Association of Medical Assistants is providing a valuable service to the medical assisting profession, employers of medical assistants, and the American public. Indeed, the CMA (AAMA) is becoming the allied health professional of choice for ambulatory health care delivery settings. ♦

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