

Career Ladder

CMA (AAMA) Reaches New Heights as a Medical Assistant Coordinator



By Cathy Cassata

When Melinda Hoffman, CMA (AAMA), graduated from medical assisting school in 2012, she landed a job with a small family practice clinic in her hometown of Merrill, Wisconsin.

"It was a very busy clinic for being small, and I learned a lot," she says.

After two years, she transitioned to a pharmacy technician role at a local hospital for a few years and then took some time off to care for her young children before going back to a family practice.

In 2016, she was ready for a change and landed a job as an endoscopy technician, assisting with pre- and post-procedures in the endoscopy center at GI Associates. She then decided to work in the clinic at GI Associates, where she carried out a more traditional medical assisting position.

"The [physician] I was working for had started the practice and was getting close to

retirement. I wasn't sure if I wanted to work with a new [physician], but I decided to go for it," says Hoffman. "I'm so happy that I did because we have a great working relationship."

Her day-to-day duties involve assisting the physician when he is in the clinic by rooming patients; taking vital signs; ordering medications, laboratory tests, and imaging studies; scheduling procedures; and educating patients on preparation for procedures. When the physician is performing surgeries, Hoffman is in the clinic managing his schedule, calling patients who are due for visits, processing prescription refills, preparing charts, and answering patient calls.

"We're very efficient together and in hindsight, I'm glad I decided to take on the challenge of working with a new provider," she says.

She excelled in her role so much that she was eventually promoted to medical assistant coordinator, a position that requires her to manage the schedules of six medical assistants, ensuring coverage for the providers. She also runs monthly staff meetings and weekly leadership meetings with the clinic's leadership team to discuss learning opportunities and ways to improve practice efficiency.

"It was a huge addition to my responsibilities, but I want to serve my team and

make sure their needs are met each and every day," says Hoffman. "I want them to know how appreciated they are and that I'm their advocate."

She takes her role to heart. "I understand our medical assistants' workload and their frustrations because I'm right there with them. I'm not just a leader who's above them, telling them what to do. I'm still a medical assistant doing the same work that they're doing," she says.

When she began her medical assisting career, she never thought taking on a leadership role was possible without a nursing degree. "It seemed like in many clinics, nurses were the leaders, which kind of proved not to work because the nurses don't understand the medical assistant's workload, just like medical assistants don't understand the [registered nurse's] workload," says Hoffman.

The coordinator and leadership roles push her to grow and gain skills in time management and conflict resolution.

"I started at a small practice working part-time, and over time, my career blossomed. It wasn't always easy, but it's been rewarding," says Hoffman. "Anyone can do it, you just have to trust in your medical assisting skills and be willing to work hard." ♦