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Why more employers are hiring CMAs (AAMA)

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. 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 work force.

First of all, the United States continues to be one of the most litigious nations in the civilized 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 physician's 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 duties.)

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 therefore are 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—especially certain provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) and the Clinical Laboratory Improvements Act (CLIA)—are making mandatory credentialing for medical assistants a logical next step in the hiring process. Although OSHA and CLIA do not *per se* require medical assistants to have the CMA (AAMA) credential, there are various components of these statutes and their regulations that can be met by demonstrating that the medical assistants in the clinical setting are certified. Furthermore, private sector bodies, such as the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) and the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA), often look favorably upon (although do not mandate) such professional credentials as the CMA (AAMA) to verify the competence of medical assistants.

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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