



Occupational Profile: **Medical Assistants**

This series is intended for use by workforce development professionals and educational institutions looking to ensure that programs are aligned with the skills and competencies employers value most for today's healthcare workforce.

Medical Assistants in a Transformed Healthcare System

Medical assistants (MAs) are key members of ambulatory and primary care teams. The workforce is growing in volume and in importance as more care is delivered in outpatient settings, where medical assistants are a significant proportion of the workforce. As state policy has increased the focus on population health, the skills that employers look for in their medical assistants have evolved. Many report the increased importance of medical assistants in outpatient and community-based settings, and they now expect this workforce to be adept at new skills such as health coaching, motivational interviewing, and data collection. To ensure that medical assistants are prepared to succeed on the job, workforce training and educational institutions should develop programs in keeping with the professional skills and emerging population health competencies that employers desire.

“Medical assistants are no longer just rooming patients and taking vitals. We’re moving toward care coordination, reducing avoidable hospitalizations by looking at the social determinants of health, quality over quantity, and team-based care. MA’s play a huge role in that effort.”

– Community Healthcare Network

What is a Medical Assistant?

Medical assistants—sometimes called patient care associates, medical office assistants, or administrative medical assistants—perform administrative and certain clinical duties under the direction of a physician. These tasks can include taking vital signs and medical histories, preparing patients for exams, drawing blood, scheduling appointments, and maintaining medical records. Increasingly, employers report valuing medical assistants who are equipped for both the clinical tasks and front-desk patient representative duties.

Typical patient-focused tasks:

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| Greeting and rooming patients |
| Cleaning and re-stocking exam rooms and preparing medical equipment |
| Taking vital signs and body measurements |
| Taking and documenting patient histories, chief complaints, and other patient data |
| Performing clinical tests including taking urine samples, blood draws, EKGs, pregnancy tests, HIV tests, and glucose level tests |
| Preparing and developing urine samples and fecal blood tests |
| Conducting vision and hearing tests |
| Applying and removing bandages |
| Administering screening questionnaires |
| Health coaching and distributing educational materials |

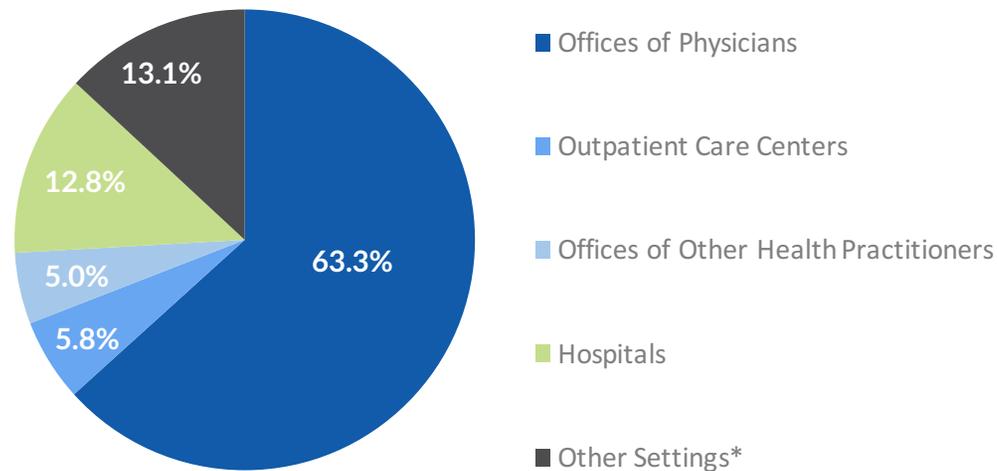
Typical administrative tasks:

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| Managing phones |
| Scheduling appointments |
| Calling patients for appointment reminders or follow-up on test results |
| Maintaining medical records and obtaining records from other providers |
| Registering patients and assisting with forms |
| Verifying insurance |
| Processing prescription refills |
| Coordinating referrals to social service providers |
| Coordinating between members of care team |
| Pre-visit planning and chart preparation |

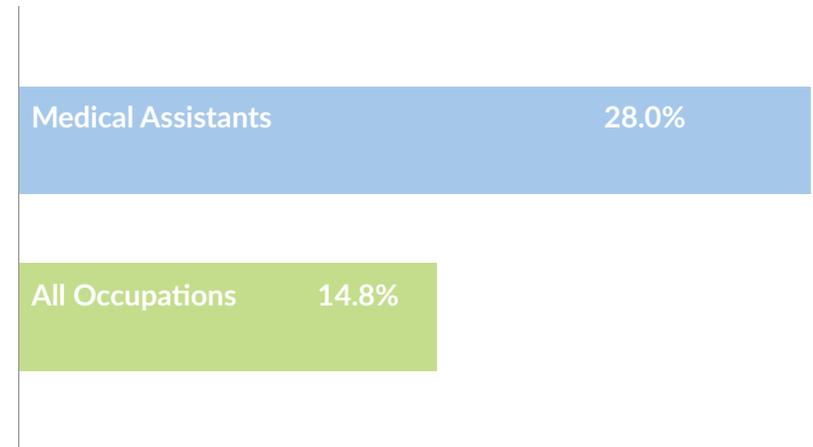
Occupational Outlook

The shift to a focus on outpatient and community-based healthcare delivery has increased the importance of the role of the medical assistant and driven increased demand for this workforce in New York City. Statewide, three-quarters of medical assistants work in outpatient and community-based practices. In New York City, there are currently 11,490 medical assistants employed, and the number of medical assistants is predicted to increase by 28 percent between 2014 and 2024—which is nearly double the rate of projected growth for all occupations during that time. The NYS Department of Labor predicts the need for 3,450 new medical assistant positions over the coming decade.

Where Medical Assistants Work, New York State, 2016



Projected Occupational Growth, New York City, 2014-2024



* Other Settings: Colleges and Universities, Employment Services, and settings unspecified

Chart Sources: NYS Department of Labor, Occupational Employment Statistics, 2016 Industry Employment for Medical Assistants (31-9092); NYS Department of Labor, Long-Term Occupational Projections, 2014-2024.

Background and Education

Employers report seeking medical assistants with the following qualities...

Good communication skills, with patients and members of the care team

Pro-active problem solving skills and critical thinking

Works well in teams and enjoys working with people

Cultural competence and ability to work with diverse groups of people

Detail-oriented, especially with documentation

Empathetic, compassionate, and friendly

Computer literate, able to navigate electronic medical records

Effective in a fast-paced environment and ability to remain calm and focused

Fluency in languages other than English

"[T]hese are critical professional skills that seem obvious but not everyone who comes to work in these roles has them. These criteria should be widely used... 'soft' skills are critical and often the most challenging in building up the medical assistant workforce."

– CityMD

Preferred education and training...

High school degree or equivalency

Medical assistant-specific training

One of the two nationally-recognized certifications (American Association of Medical Assistants or National Healthcareer Association)

EKG, Phlebotomy, and CPR certification

"Medical assistants need to understand that they are a vital part of the care team and not just 'MAs.' We need MAs who take ownership of their work and are actively engaged in the delivery of patient care. They need to be hands-on, fully energized, active learners, highly adaptive to change, and have a roll-up your sleeve can-do attitude."

– Mount Sinai Health System



NYACH's Core Competencies

Today's healthcare workforce requires a foundational knowledge-base. To that end, the New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (NYACH) developed consensus around 9 core competencies and compiled related resources essential for educating today's healthcare workforce, including medical assistants.

1. New Models of Care and Health Care Trends
2. Interdisciplinary Teams
3. Person-Centeredness & Communication
4. Chronic Diseases & Social Determinants of Health
5. Cultural Competence
6. Ethics and Professional Boundaries
7. Quality Improvement
8. Community Orientation
9. Health IT, Documentation, and Confidentiality

See: <https://tinyurl.com/NYACHcore>

Essential Components of Medical Assistant Training Programs

| Course | Employers emphasize that medical assistants should... |
|---------------------------|--|
| Medical Terminology | Be familiar with medical terminology to ensure best practices on documentation, standard procedures, medical history, diagnosis, and medical specialties. |
| Anatomy and Physiology | Have a strong grasp on anatomy and physiology. Employers feel that many MA programs do not spend enough time on ensuring mastery of these subject areas. |
| Today's Medical Assistant | Have a clear understanding of the MA role and how it fits into today's healthcare delivery models which are patient-centered, team-based, and focus on prevention and wellness. This includes ensuring that MAs have a strong foundation in NYACH's Core Competencies (see call-out box, pg. 3). |
| Electrocardiogram | Have EKG certification, and MA training programs should ensure that adequate time is spent on EKG analysis so that students are prepared to sit for the certification exam. |
| Phlebotomy | Be certified in phlebotomy, which means that a high quality MA training program will prepare students to sit for the exam and give adequate practical experience in phlebotomy draws and in engaging with patients to ensure a level of comfort. |
| Clinical Procedures | Learn proper medical office procedures including workplace hazards, medical waste disposal, hygiene, and emergency care. Employers also recommend training prepare MAs for taking medical histories and conducting physical exams. |
| Medical Office Assistant | Be prepared for front-desk roles and understand topics such as professional etiquette, customer service and patient satisfaction, health information technology, and documentation and confidentiality, in addition to basic medical office skills. Many of today's medical assistants, especially those employed in smaller physician offices, will perform medical office functions in addition to clinical tasks. |
| Internship | Have completed meaningful work-based learning experiences that incorporate practical training in the following areas: office duties, medical asepsis and OSHA standards, EKG and Phlebotomy, patient preparation and physical exams, vital sign measurement, and basic laboratory tests. |

Sources

New York State Department of Labor, Occupation Employment Statistics Program (2017, March 30). New York State Employment and Wage Estimates, 2016. New York City Region. Retrieved from <https://www.labor.ny.gov/stats/lwWage2.asp>

New York State Department of Labor, Long-Term Occupational Projections, 2014-2024. (2017). Retrieved from: <https://www.labor.ny.gov/stats/lproj.shtm>

Qualitative research, consisting of employer and industry expert interviews, focus groups, and surveys, was performed by NYACH.

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The New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (NYACH) is an Industry Partnership, bringing together multiple stakeholders of the healthcare industry in order to address the sector's rapidly changing labor force needs. NYACH's mission is to build an effective healthcare workforce development system in NYC by identifying healthcare employers' needs; helping education and training organizations adapt their approach to better meet those needs; and ensuring low income and unemployed New Yorkers have access to viable career opportunities in healthcare. NYACH is a public-private partnership between the NYC Department of Small Business Services, the Workforce Funders, and JPMorgan Chase Foundation. For more information, visit our website at: <http://nyachnyc.org/>