

MEDICAL ASSISTING PROGRAMS - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**What is Medical Assisting?**

*A medical assistant performs a mix of administrative and clinical functions in a medical office under direct supervision by a physician. This means a physician has to be present onsite.*

**What does an MA do?**

*Examples of MA tasks are:*

* *measuring blood pressure, pulse, temperature, height, weight*
* *performing ear irrigations, eye tests and lab tests like urinalysis, glucose tests, pregnancy tests, etc.*
* *giving injections into muscle or fat tissue and placing skin tests*
* *performing breathing tests and administering oral or inhaled medications*
* *drawing blood from a patient’s vein and preparing samples for lab testing*
* *assisting physicians with examinations and preparing patients for specialty exams and tests*
* *providing patient education and relaying advice according to physician directions*
* *updating and maintaining accurate medical records*
* *scheduling patients for appointments, tests and procedures*
* *managing a physician’s daily schedule and ensuring efficient patient flow through the office*
* *using medical terminology to document clinical information and extract relevant updates from incoming records and reports*
* *establish and maintain communication with the patient’s healthcare team*

**Do MAs work in hospitals?**

*A physician must be physically onsite wherever an MA performs any clinical tasks on patients, which is not the case in hospital settings where nurses carry out physician orders independently under their own licenses. MAs are not licensed and must be supervised by physicians or their specific delegates (physician assistant or nurse practitioner). It is possible to become separately licensed as a CNA (certified nursing assistant) or EKG technician and perform limited patient care within the scope of those job descriptions.*

*Administrative medical personnel may work in hospital departments such as admissions or medical records.*

**If I earn a “Certificate of Achievement” at MPC, does it mean I will be a certified medical assistant?**

*No. These are two very different things. The Certificate of Achievement acknowledges your successful completion of all required courses in a program but to get certified, you need to take an exam through an outside agency. MPC’s medical assisting program is recognized by the American Medical Technologists (AMT), and, upon completion of the MA program, students are eligible to take that agency’s exam to earn the Registered Medical Assistant (RMA) credential, which is the same as certification.*

**Will becoming an MA help me choose a path in healthcare?**

*Medical Assisting involves every aspect of patient care. You get the full picture and will find many opportunities to develop your talents and interests along the way. You may at some point choose to become a specialty MA in fields such as dermatology, orthopedics, ophthalmology or pediatrics. Continuing education courses to earn additional certificates such as: pharmacy technician, x-ray technician, lab technician, health IT technician, etc. are available throughout the Bay Area or online and can add opportunities and versatility to your healthcare career.*

**I’m interested in medicine but don’t like “blood and guts.” What are my choices?**

*MPC offers certificate choices for administrative medical office careers that don’t involve direct patient care. You will learn about anatomy, pharmacology and medical terminology and train in office procedures from patient reception to insurance billing. Examples of non-clinical career choices are: medical receptionist, insurance specialist, coding/billing specialist, schedule coordinator, medical records specialist, scribe or medical transcriptionist. New career opportunities open as the healthcare field evolves using technology and advances in patient care.*

**How long does it take to complete a program?**

*Courses for the Certificate of Achievement can be completed in 3 semesters\* with full-time attendance.*

*An Associate’s of Science degree can be earned in approximately 2 years with full-time attendance.*

*\*After completing all of the MA courses, students complete a one-month (160 hours) externship in a medical facility. This is NOT required for the two administrative programs.*

**Can I go to school part-time?**

*Yes. There is no requirement to enroll full time. We want to make our programs accessible to students who have jobs or family responsibilities outside of school and we understand that full-time enrollment is not possible for everyone. Each course stands on its own but be sure to follow a logical order in your course selections, see next question.*

**In what order should I take my courses?**

*Some courses are offered every semester and at different times. Some courses are only offered during spring or fall semester, and some courses have prerequisites. See “SUGGESTED ORDER OF COURSES” links on the MEDA webpage for more information. Your counselor can help you make a plan that fits your life. Be sure to plan study time in addition to class attendance. Each course has a set amount of units based on relative difficulty and time investment. Each unit for a course carries an expectation of at least 2 hours of home study time per week. For example, you should plan to study 6 hours per week for a 3-unit course.*

**What is the advantage of earning an A.S. degree?**

*A degree is not required to work as an MA or medical administrative assistant but many employers prefer it. The additional general education classes add depth to the student’s education and enhance his/her performance as a professional healthcare assistant. A degree may be required for advancement in the field or to lay the foundation for additional education down the road.*

**What is the enrollment process for the MA programs at MPC?**

*There is no official enrollment process into the MA programs at MPC. You should meet with one of the college’s counselors to create an individualized education plan before registering for classes. If you plan on becoming a medical assistant, you also need to make an appointment to meet with the MA Department Chair, Monika Bell, within 4 weeks of starting your first semester so we can discuss your goals.*

**Do I need to enroll in a program in order to take courses?**

*It is not necessary to commit to any of the MA programs before taking courses. Many of our courses are very well suited to provide continuing education to working MAs or anyone interested in healthcare. Check the course requisites before enrolling.*

**Are any of the courses offered online?**

*We are in the process of creating an online medical terminology course (projected to be offered spring 2015) and plan on adding other online courses in the future. Check our webpage for updates!*

**How much does it cost to complete a MEDA program?**

*California Community Colleges charge $46 per unit. Most courses also require purchase of a textbook and materials. Some additional fees apply for things like parking and student health services. Financial aid or student loans are available. For more information about fees and program requirements, see the current edition of the college catalog.*

**Are courses taken at other colleges transferable to the MA programs?**

*Some general education courses may be transferable. Your counselor will determine whether or not they meet MPC standards. Medical assisting courses are generally not transferable.*

**How much does an MA earn?**

*Entry-level MAs may earn anywhere from $12 to $16 per hour, depending on the type of clinic, responsibilities and location. Many employers base wage increases on performance, which means that an efficient and motivated MA can potentially advance rapidly on the pay scale. Many healthcare employers offer health insurance and other benefits. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects substantial employment growth for MAs over the next few years.*

**Will MPC help me find a job after graduation?**

*At times, employers request referral of our best and brightest. Sometimes, a student is hired by his or her externship site. All the material covered in school directly relates to the field and any recommendation for job placement is based on a student’s classroom performance, competency and professionalism. With hard work and determination, success is achievable and it starts on day 1.*

**Is there a faster way to earn a certificate in medical assisting?**

*Not at MPC. This is not a quick in-and-out program.*

**If you have a question that has not been answered here, please email Monika Bell at** **mbell@mpc.edu**