Lesson 1
Welcome to the World of Health Care

Step 1  Learning Objectives for Lesson 1

When you have completed the instruction in this lesson, you will be trained to do the following:

- Describe the duties of a medical assistant.
- Determine common terminology used in a doctor’s office.
- Compare and contrast the various types of jobs available to the medical assistant.
- Identify the primary medical specialties and their abbreviations.
- Explain how different types of medical personnel each ensure quality health care.
- Contrast the layout of a large medical practice to that of a small medical practice.
- Describe the desirable character traits of medical assistants.
- Outline the components that contribute to a professional appearance.
- Summarize the medical assistant’s code of ethics.

Step 2  Lesson Preview

Chances are that you’ve been to the doctor’s office and maybe even your local hospital a few times in your life (though hopefully not too often!). You’ve seen doctors, nurses and office administrators hard at work in these settings, but how much do you really know about what they do? Well, in this first lesson, we’ll take you behind the scenes at hospitals and doctors’ offices.

You’ll also see where you, the medical assistant, fit in. You’ll learn about your future job duties and see how you will interact with other healthcare professionals. We’ll also discuss a few of your many job opportunities. Lastly, we’ll cover some important, but often overlooked, information that will help you succeed—professionalism on the job. Whether it’s the way you interact with patients, or the way you should dress, you’ll find the answers here.

Being an MA will open doors for you as a respected and vital member of the medical team.
Introduction to Medical Assisting

Your dream to enter the field of medicine is an important one. Once you learn the technical and administrative skills presented in this course, you'll be one of the most versatile employees in health care today. As a medical assistant (also called an MA), you will have many choices as you grow and mature in your career. You’ll be qualified to apply for jobs in hospitals, labs, clinics and many other facilities. You may find that you enjoy both front office and back office duties. This will make you an even more valuable employee. Being an MA will open doors for you as a respected and vital member of the medical team. Everything you need to know to become a successful medical assistant is right here in this course. All you need to do is keep reading!

Step 3 Daily Activities in the Medical Office

To fully understand what a medical assistant does, you must first understand how medical office personnel gather information. This information includes patient data, insurance company information and doctors’ notes.

To illustrate all of this, let’s take a look at a typical day in a medical office, or an outpatient setting. (Outpatient settings include clinics, physicians’ offices, outpatient surgery facilities and hospital emergency rooms. Inpatient settings include hospitals—or facilities where patients are admitted for an overnight stay.)

A Day in the Life of a Medical Assistant

Monday morning, 7:45 a.m.

Taylor is a medical assistant for a family medical practice with two doctors, Carla Matthews and Summer Gray. On arrival at the office, she sees the office manager, Margy, pulling today’s charts for the scheduled patients. Margy is generally the first person to greet patients, but if she is out sick, Taylor’s administrative skills allow her to fulfill Margy’s duties. Margy will then print and attach a superbill, or encounter form, to each file. A superbill is a standard form that contains a list of the most common procedures the doctor performs at that office. The files are in order by appointment. Taylor helps Margy work through the stack of files, checking to see that all the appropriate lab and x-ray reports are also attached.

Margy also has a few new patients coming in so she readies some blank files for them. She will create each patient’s medical file by having the patient fill out a few questionnaires. She gives all new patients a New Patient Questionnaire, which includes things like their address, where they work, phone numbers, insurance and other information. This information is called the patient’s demographics. Margy will also have all new patients complete a Health History Form, which asks in detail about health history and any medications they are taking. While Margy is handling the phones, Taylor will then enter all of this information on the computer, creating the new patient’s medical record, a file of all of the patient’s medical history related to that doctor and her office.

Medical assistants will often check in the patients before they see the doctor.
Margy is also in charge of delegating, or assigning duties for the day. She asks Taylor to perform the monthly audit of expiration dates on pharmaceutical samples over the course of this week. Taylor knows how important it is to monitor these drugs. Out-of-date drugs can chemically change or lose their beneficial effects.

By this time, several patients have arrived and checked in with Margy. Taylor or Dr. Gray’s medical assistant, Kathy, have shown them to an examination room. Margy informs Taylor that one of Dr. Matthews’ patients, Jill, is on her way to the office with possible strep throat. Taylor knows that she will need to get Jill’s vital signs upon arrival and prepare the exam room for an exam of Jill’s head, ears, neck, nose and throat. She also anticipates that Dr. Matthews will ask her to perform a strep culture of Jill’s throat. Taylor prepares the exam room by making sure the otoscope is there and that there are tongue blades and cotton applicators available in the room.

When Jill arrives, Taylor takes her to the exam room and takes her vital signs. She immediately notes that Jill’s temperature is elevated at 100.2 °F orally. Her BP, or blood pressure, is 102/70, her pulse is 72 and her respirations are 20. Then Taylor asks about her symptoms, or what is wrong. Jill gives a chief complaint of sore throat, but also of runny nose (rhinorrhea), left earache (otalgia) and a cough productive of white mucus. Jill’s concise statement of why she’s seeking treatment is called the chief complaint. Because of the cough, Taylor knows that Dr. Matthews will also listen to Jill’s lung sounds; so she gives Jill a gown and asks her to remove the clothing on her upper body so that her breath sounds will be clear.

After recording these findings in her file, Taylor closes the chart and places it backwards in the rack outside the door to preserve confidentiality. She then notifies Dr. Matthews that her patient is ready to be examined.

When Dr. Matthews comes out of the exam room, she asks Taylor to go in and perform a throat culture on Jill. She wants Taylor to do a rapid screen so that she will know the results immediately and can prescribe the appropriate medication for her, if needed. A rapid screen is a test for strep throat that can be performed in the office while the patient is still there.

Taylor gathers the rapid screen test kit and re-enters the exam room. After explaining what she needs to do, Taylor puts on gloves, asks Jill to open her mouth and places a tongue blade on her tongue. At the same time, she uses a sterile, cotton-tipped applicator in her other hand to swab Jill’s throat, being careful to include both sides and the center of her throat. Taylor then swabs the material onto the test kit and returns to the lab to interpret the results. She tells Jill that she may get dressed while she waits for the results.

In the lab, Taylor reports to Dr. Matthews that the results are negative; that is, Jill does not have a strep infection of her throat. She records this result on a lab sheet to be placed in Jill’s file. Dr. Matthews returns to the exam room to let Jill know the diagnosis—she has a common viral upper respiratory infection. She instructs Jill to use salt water gargles, acetaminophen for her low-grade fever and discomfort, and prescribes an over-the-counter (OTC) medication to help with her runny nose. She is to call if her temperature goes over 102 °F or if she’s not feeling better in five days.
After the patient leaves, Taylor hears Dr. Matthews dictating a report of the encounter:

**SUBJECTIVE**
Patient complains of sore throat, and cough for a few days. She woke up today with an earache on the left and says her nose is running a bit also. She reports that everyone in her office is sick.

**OBJECTIVE**
Throat is beefy red laterally with no exudate noted; however, there is clear sinus drainage going down the sides of her throat. Right ear is clear; left tympanic membrane is dull but no bulging or erythema (redness) noted. Canal is clear.
Neck is supple, no cervical adenopathy
Nares show some irritation and small amount of clear drainage.
Lungs clear to auscultation.

**ASSESSMENT**
URI (upper respiratory infection), probably viral.
Rapid strep test is negative.

**PLAN**
Sudafed, as directed.
Recommended saline gargles, acetaminophen for fever and discomfort.
Call if temp goes over 102 °F or not getting better in 5 days.

As Taylor continues her day, helping out in the front office when Margy’s at lunch and assisting Dr. Matthews, she smiles with satisfaction. Not only does she love the feeling of helping people, but she’s proud of the difference she makes in people’s lives through the skills she’s learned.

Let’s take a break here to review what you’ve learned so far. Complete the following Practice Exercise, then we’ll move on to the opportunities that await you as a medical assistant!
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Step 4 Practice Exercise 1-1

For the following questions, choose the best term to complete each sentence. Not all terms will be used. None of the terms will be used more than once.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>nurse</th>
<th>make appointments</th>
<th>exam</th>
<th>see patients at home</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>billing form</td>
<td>office manager</td>
<td>diagnosis</td>
<td>problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make diagnoses</td>
<td>perform throat cultures</td>
<td>prescribe medication</td>
<td>transcribes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complaint</td>
<td>superbill</td>
<td>codes</td>
<td>draw blood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take vital signs</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. The ___________________________ is usually the first person in the doctor’s office to see a patient.

2. The encounter form is also called the ____________________________.

3. When the patient tells the doctor what’s wrong, this information is called the chief _________________.

4. The three steps a doctor follows when seeing a patient include the complaint, ___________________________ and treatment or procedure.

5. The medical assistant can ___________________________ and ___________________________.

Step 5 Review Practice Exercise 1-1

Review your answers with the Answer Key at the back of this instruction pack. Correct any mistakes you may have made.

Step 6 Welcome to Your Career as a Medical Assistant!

Medical assistants perform two types of duties: administrative and clinical. They answer phones or administer medications; greet patients and then help them prepare for their exams; arrange hospital admissions, schedule appointments and even perform lab tests. These skills and more are what make medical assistants so valuable in the healthcare industry. Let’s take a look at the two roles of medical assistants.
Administrative

Administrative MAs are important members of the healthcare team. Their wide variety of clerical skills keep the office running smoothly. Administrative medical assistants can:

- answer the phones
- set appointments
- handle referrals
- check in patients
- help patients fill out forms
- copy medical records for insurance documentation
- update medical records
- order supplies and equipment
- coordinate outside services, such as labs and radiology
- bill and collect money from insurance companies and patients for the doctor’s services
- arrange hospital admissions
- manage all correspondence
- provide patient education
- manage record storage and perform the filing
- conduct the banking for the business
- perform the accounting and bookkeeping

Depending on the size of the office, medical assistants may do one, several or all of these jobs. Doctors depend on highly skilled administrative medical assistants to handle these specialized tasks so they can concentrate on treating patients.

You will be learning all of these skills in the lessons ahead, so that if you choose, you can take on this important role in the physician’s office.
Medical assistants who work in the back office have more clinical duties than administrative. They must not only know their basic clinical skills, but also be on their toes to anticipate their physicians’ needs throughout the day. Clinical medical assistants can:

- take measurements and vital signs
- prepare patients for exams
- listen to and handle tasks related to patient complaints
- assist the physician in performing examinations, diagnostics and surgical procedures
- assist with treatments
- perform first-aid and emergency procedures
- draw and test blood
- take body fluid specimens
- care for wounds
- remove sutures
- sterilize equipment
- perform lab tests on bacterial smears and cultures
- phone in prescription refills
- prepare and administer medication
- perform EKGs and x-rays

Digital x-rays allow doctors to evaluate a patient’s condition much more quickly.
Of course, many of these clinical skills are practiced on the job, so you should not expect to perform all of these procedures as an entry-level MA.

Patient education is an important part of medical care. You may be called upon to give instructions prior to a procedure, to coach a patient with a diet change or to instruct him on proper medication dosages. Once again, an MA in a large office may specialize in one or a few of these procedures, but if you're working in a small medical practice, you may have the opportunity to do all of these!

No matter where you work—large office or small, front office or back—you will be a part of a team of professionals that strives to offer the best customer service and medical attention possible.

**Where Will I Work?**

The typical job setting for an MA is a doctor’s office. However, the type of office could be a small, one physician practice or a very large clinic with 15 to 20 providers. Some clinics will offer an extravagant décor with furnishings that are quite lavish while others will have a more economical and clinical atmosphere. No matter what the environment, the personnel strive to provide medical care that meets the standards of the state and our society. Let’s take a look at the physician’s office and some other settings where a medical assistant may work.

**Physician’s Office**

Over half of all medical assistants work in a physician’s office. In small practices, medical assistants usually handle both administrative and clinical duties. A large medical clinic may employ several MAs, who all specialize in different aspects of medical care. They may report to an office manager, physician or other health practitioner.

**Laboratory**

Many doctors conduct research rather than treat patients. For example, a research scientist may specialize in the study of HIV/AIDS. A medical assistant working in a laboratory can assist the researcher by drawing blood specimens, performing tests on urine samples or handling all the front office duties. Other laboratories specialize in breast cancer, diabetes, infectious diseases and hundreds of other medical problems that our society would like to cure.

**Urgent Care Clinic**

Urgent care clinics are much like a doctor’s office. An MA might still get patients ready for exams, take vital signs, assist with wounds and run tests for employment physicals. However, an urgent care clinic might also require a faster pace, treating patients with urgent or even emergent injuries. Many Worker’s Compensation accident victims come to these clinics for treatment. This could be an exciting place to work, but it requires fast work and quick thinking.
Hospital

Have you ever gotten lost trying to find a sick friend or relative in the hospital? Well, you’re not alone. A hospital can be huge, with departments ranging from blood donor clinics to billing offices to intensive care units. With all of these services, a hospital can provide many different settings for an MA to work in.

Typically, hospitals use nurses and nurses’ assistants to provide bedside care, and hire medical assistants as technicians. An MA who likes working with equipment, such as EKGs and x-ray equipment, would enjoy assisting in radiology or other departments where these tests are run. Other departments, such as the emergency department or the obstetrics unit, would be faster paced, appealing to the MA who prefers to keep on her toes. Still other departments, such as special procedures labs, offer a different kind of work setting. And lastly, many medical assistants work in clerical positions such as hospital admissions, patient billing and medical records.2

As you can see, the work settings are as varied as the MA’s duties can be. This course will teach you everything you need to know to enter the medical assisting profession. And once you’re employed, you’ll receive specialized training for the job that you’ve chosen. If you move across the United States, you might discover that a different set of your medical assisting skills is required in other areas. Be sure to stay informed through a professional organization, such as the American Association of Medical Assistants (www.aama-ntl.org) or American Medical Technologists (www.americanmedicaltech.org), about changes and new opportunities in your career. One or both of these organizations offer publications, seminars, certification, continuing education and other services. In addition, you can qualify for certification from these organizations.

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Medical Assistant Professional Organizations

National Healthcareer Association

The NHA supports the allied healthcareer industry with NHA National Certification exams. These include the Certified Medical Administrative Assistant (CMAA) exam, which you are eligible to sit for as soon as you successfully complete the Introduction to Medical Assisting course. After you are employed, and your employer verifies your phlebotomy experience, you will be able to sit for the Certified Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA) exam.

Address: 7 Ridgedale Avenue, Suite 203
Cedar Knolls, NJ 07927
Phone: (800) 499-9092
Web site: www.nhanow.com

National Center for Competency Testing

The NCCT is an independent agency that validates the competence of candidates in many different fields by examination. The NCCT offers the National Certified Medical Assistant (NCMA) credential. After gaining accreditation by the NCCT, certificants are required to complete a minimum of 14 clock hours of continuing education on an annual basis to maintain active status.

Address: 7007 College Blvd., Suite 705
Overland Park, KS 66221
Phone: (800) 875-4404
Web site: www.ncctinc.com

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Medical Assistant Specialists

As you learned above, just as physicians specialize in specific fields of medicine, MAs also have the opportunity to become specialized. The special training may take place on the job, or you may be asked to attend classes or to take a self-study course. You can even earn special certifications in certain fields. The American Society of Podiatric Medical Assistants awards the Podiatric Medical Assistant, Certified credential; and The Joint Commission on Allied Health Personnel in Ophthalmology awards credentials at three levels: Certified Ophthalmic Assistant; Certified Ophthalmic Technician; and Certified Ophthalmic Medical Technologist.

Let’s take a look at a few of the many exciting specialties that you can explore.

Podiatry

A podiatrist, or DPM (doctor of podiatric medicine), specializes in diagnosis and treatment of problems of the feet. If you work for a podiatrist, you might take specialized x-rays, learn and do physical therapy, assist with surgery, make castings and assist with foot taping and binding.

Ophthalmology

An ophthalmologist studies the structure, function and diseases of the eye. Working for an ophthalmologist might involve teaching patients contact lens care, helping patients select eye glasses, conducting diagnostic tests, measuring and recording vision, testing eye muscle function, administering eye medications and dressings and assisting in eye surgery.

Dermatology

Dermatology is the science that deals with the skin, its structure, functions, diseases and treatment. As a medical assistant for a dermatologist, you may assist with performing and testing biopsies, assist with surgeries and educating patients on proper skin care.

Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT)

As you will discover in upcoming anatomy lessons, problems of the ear, nose and throat often happen at the same time, since all of these body features are so close together. Working for a physician who specializes in the ear, nose and throat (also called an otolaryngologist) might involve taking specialty x-rays, assisting with surgeries and scheduling tests.

Finding your way around a hospital can be confusing if you are not sure what specialist you are there to see.
Lesson 1—Welcome to the World of Health Care

**Obstetrics and Gynecology**

A doctor who specializes in obstetrics and gynecology (an OB/GYN for short) is called an **obstetrician** or **gynecologist**. OB/GYNs treat women’s reproductive systems—when they are pregnant and when they are not. An MA may assist with many procedures such as Pap smears and amniocentesis, educate patients about the importance of monthly self exams and may monitor the doctor’s pregnant patients, scheduling their appointments and procedures at the right times throughout their pregnancies.

**Urology**

A **urologist**, or **Uro**, treats the female urinary tract and the male genitourinary tract. As mentioned above, testing urine specimens may be a duty, as well as taking specialty x-rays, assisting with procedures, testing cultures and scheduling procedures.

Other physician specialties that you may encounter include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialist</th>
<th>Specialty</th>
<th>Abbreviation, if any</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allergist</td>
<td>Diagnosis and treatment of allergies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiologist</td>
<td>The heart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endocrinologist</td>
<td>Gland disorders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Practitioner</td>
<td>Care of patients of all ages</td>
<td>FP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gastroenterologist</td>
<td>Disorders of the GI tract</td>
<td>GE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geriatrician</td>
<td>Care of the elderly</td>
<td>Geri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hematologist</td>
<td>Blood disorders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infectious Disease Specialist</td>
<td>Disease trends, chronic wounds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internist</td>
<td>Diagnosis and nonsurgical treatment of disease</td>
<td>IM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nephrologist</td>
<td>Kidney problems</td>
<td>Nephro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neurologist</td>
<td>Study and treatment of nerve disorders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Health Specialist</td>
<td>Management of worker’s comp cases; hiring physicals, drug &amp; alcohol testing, respiratory and hearing protection programs</td>
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</table>
Physician Specialties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialist</th>
<th>Specialty</th>
<th>Abbreviation, if any</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oncologist</td>
<td>Cancer treatment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Orthopedist, or Orthopod</td>
<td>Bone and joint disorders</td>
<td>Ortho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osteopath</td>
<td>Bone alignment to correct diseases</td>
<td>DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain Control Specialist</td>
<td>Management of chronic pain (back pain, headaches, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pathologist</td>
<td>Study of tissue samples to diagnose disorders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pediatrician</td>
<td>Infant, child and adolescent care</td>
<td>Peds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Care Physician</td>
<td>Care of patients of all ages, usually Family Practice or Internal Medicine</td>
<td>FP IM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatrist</td>
<td>Psychotherapy</td>
<td>Psych</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulmonologist</td>
<td>The lungs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgeon</td>
<td>Surgery in a variety of fields</td>
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</table>

As you can see, there are plenty of opportunities for medical assistants to find the right niche! And because medical assistants are so versatile, the demand for their services has increased dramatically. In fact, according to the U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of medical assistants is projected to be one of the fastest growing occupations over the next several years. The need for medical assistants will consistently grow as the healthcare industry expands because of technological advances in medicine and the growth and aging of the population.

Employment growth will be driven by the increase in the number of group practices, clinics and other healthcare facilities that need a high proportion of support personnel, particularly the flexible medical assistant who can handle both administrative and clinical duties.3

Step 7  A Little Teamwork Goes a Long Way

- Now you know how information flows in medical settings. You have a basic understanding of what some healthcare employees, such as office managers and doctors, do in a typical day in a medical office. Now let’s take a closer look at all of the key players in hospitals and doctors’ offices and talk more about the work they do.
In most professions, teams of people work together to accomplish goals, and this is true of physicians as well. In medicine, doctors certainly do not work alone. Many people work hard, some behind the scenes, others more visibly, to ensure that our healthcare system works properly. When you go to see the doctor, you don’t just see the doctor. You might see a number of people, including a receptionist, an office manager and a nurse. Throughout a visit the doctor may talk to several staff people, including the medical assistant. All of these people are essential members of the medical care team.

**Physicians**

Physicians or medical doctors are the most prominent members of the medical care team. They perform life-saving procedures. They cure the sick and help heal wounds. Becoming a doctor of medicine is one of the most challenging career paths a person can choose. Not only do doctors earn four-year college degrees, but they must also complete medical school and one or more residency assignments. During residency, 85- to 100-hour work weeks are common. Depending on the specialty doctors choose, they spend a minimum of 11 years getting their degree. Because of this huge commitment, doctors deservedly receive much of the attention in the medical field.

Physicians diagnose illnesses and injuries. They prescribe drugs to alleviate symptoms, treat conditions and ease pain. They rely on their training to make quality, accurate decisions. However, as good as physicians are, their staff ultimately supports them as they provide quality treatment. Nurses are one essential part of the medical staff.

**Nurses**

As professionals who perform a variety of tasks in the medical world, nurses must often follow through with the treatments physicians prescribe. Nurses can observe and record symptoms and progress, assist in surgery and administer medication. It’s also true that nurses must often do the thankless jobs—cleaning up exam rooms and organizing supplies.

Without nurses, the number of patients a doctor sees in a day would drop dramatically. Because of their nurses, doctors see more patients and are able to focus on those patients who require the most care.

**Nurse and Physician Assistants**

Two other categories of personnel in the medical field include nurse and physician assistants. Nurse assistants, also known as patient care technicians, help nurses with daily duties, such as paperwork, general organization and taking a patient’s temperature, weight and blood pressure. Some nurse assistants also talk to patients and make sure they’re comfortable.
Physician assistants, or PAs, are normally under the supervision of a doctor. PAs work the same areas as doctors and nurses, and duties might include stitching up a cut, taking a patient history and performing lab work.

**Support Staff**

Doctors and nurses rely heavily on support staff to keep a medical office, clinic or hospital running smoothly. As you might guess, each of these positions plays an important role in the medical world.

**Medical Coding Specialists**

A coding specialist typically works in an office or hospital. The medical coding specialist translates the doctor’s written diagnosis and treatment into codes. Then the coder routes the codes to a medical billing specialist who uses the codes to complete insurance claims—bills for the doctor’s services.

For example, a medical coder working for a radiologist might have a superbill indicating a patient came in for a broken finger, as well as transcription documenting how the x-ray was performed and the radiologist’s reading of the x-ray. The medical coder would apply the correct codes for the diagnosis and the procedure, and the medical billing specialist would then send these codes to the insurance company.

**Medical Billing Specialists**

Medical billing specialists are a perfect example of how interrelated one job is to the next in a medical office. Remember, coding specialists code what occurs during a patient’s medical visit, while medical billing specialists use the codes that medical coders assign. Billing specialists then complete the insurance forms necessary to collect payment from insurance companies. These specialists know that the doctor doesn’t get paid unless the form is completed and filed correctly. Billing specialists have training in medical terminology, medical records handling, and some basic coding.

**Medical Transcriptionists**

Do you remember when Dr. Matthews, in our previous example, dictated her SOAP notes about a patient encounter? Well, that dictation went to a medical transcriptionist who listened to the doctor’s dictation and typed and formatted what she heard. This written record was then added to the patient’s folder. By using transcriptionists, doctors save time by speaking their notes.

As a medical assistant, you should be aware of what transcribed reports look like. You will often read and refer to these transcribed reports. Two examples of transcribed reports follow: one for Laura Brown and one for Johnny Cruz. Study these reports so that you have a better understanding of a transcriptionist’s role in the medical records process.
Transcribed Report Example One

Name: Laura Brown
#030311

PROBLEM
Upset stomach with vomiting and fever.

SUBJECTIVE
The patient is a 22-year-old female. She went to breakfast with her friends earlier this morning. She ordered a cream-filled pastry with her coffee. She stated that no one else had a pastry. About 4 hours later, she started having an abrupt onset of nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, diarrhea, headache and a slightly elevated fever. Since she had the symptoms for over 3 hours, she called her family physician and was able to see him this afternoon.

OBJECTIVE

ASSESSMENT
Staphylococcus Toxin Gastroenteritis.

PLAN
The patient was sent home and told to get plenty of bed rest and begin clear fluids when nausea and vomiting cease. If the symptoms continue for more than three more hours, she should contact the office.

____________________________________
Robert Snow, MD

D:02-08-20xx
T:02-08-20xx
RS:cjl
Transcribed Report Example Two

Name: Johnny Cruz
#030315

PROBLEM
Sore throat with fever.

SUBJECTIVE
Johnny, a five year old, presents to his pediatrician with a sore throat, fever, loss of appetite and a headache. His mother said that he has been on the couch all morning and refuses to eat or play.

OBJECTIVE
After examining the patient, the doctor reports enlargement of the lymphatic glands and a temperature of 103º F. The oral exam reveals a swollen, bright-red throat. A throat culture is positive for strep throat.

ASSESSMENT
Acute Follicular Pharyngitis (Streptococcal Sore Throat).

PLAN
Take erythromycin as directed. Temperature to be taken frequently. Children’s Tylenol every 4-6 hours as needed for fever. Encourage bed rest, modify activities, and increase fluid intake. All citrus juices should be avoided until symptoms subside. Call office if symptoms persist.

Marikit Makabuhay, MD
D:09-15-20xx
T:09-15-20xx
MM:ddd
Medical Record Technologists

Certified medical record technologists control the flow of medical records to the various people who need to see those records. These technologists take a certification test that ensures they have the knowledge to determine what records are needed, who is authorized to see the records and how these records are organized. You may find that certified medical record technologists are also called Registered Health Information Technicians or RHITs.

Emergency Personnel

Emergency personnel are yet another group of professionals with the sole responsibility of providing immediate medical assistance and transporting the patient to the hospital for treatment. When someone is hurt and needs an ambulance, these people respond. Police officers, fire fighters and other rescue professionals all have some level of medical training.

EMTs take classes that enable them to stabilize patients who have a wide variety of emergency medical conditions.

You have probably heard of emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and paramedics. EMTs take classes that enable them to stabilize patients who have a wide variety of emergency medical conditions. They are often members of ambulance crews and volunteer fire-fighting organizations. Paramedics have more training than EMTs. Paramedics are not only able to stabilize patients, but they can also begin treatments to cure patients, such as administering medication.

Office Professionals

Do you remember Margy, the office manager from our previous example? Margy is an example of an office professional. Without office managers and receptionists, many medical offices would grind to a halt! These people organize schedules, record appointments and answer patient questions. Office staff members have terrific communication and organization skills. They also must make a good first impression. The office manager may be the first person a patient sees upon entering a medical office, and her attitude can mean the difference between a pleasant visit and a nightmare for the patient.

Let’s pause here and review what you’ve learned so far with the following Practice Exercise.
**Step 8 Practice Exercise 1-2**

- For the following questions, choose the best term to complete each sentence. Not all terms will be used. None of the terms will be used more than once.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>physician</th>
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<td>feet</td>
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<td>ENT</td>
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<td>fill out forms</td>
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<td>anticipate</td>
<td>paramedic</td>
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<td>evaluate</td>
<td>fever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weight</td>
<td>ignore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The front office MA helps patients ____________________________.

2. Vital signs include blood pressure, respirations, ___________ and ___________.

3. The MA needs to __________________________ the physician’s needs.

4. A(n) ______________________ diagnoses illnesses and injuries.

5. A doctor who specializes in the treatment of disorders of the eye is known as a(n) ________________________________.

6. A podiatrist cares for a person’s ____________________________.

7. Most medical assistants work in a(n) ____________________________.

8. A(n) ____________________________ codes what occurs during a patient’s medical visit.

9. The MA has two types of duties: _________________ and ________________.

10. A(n) ______________________ has more training than an EMT and is not only able to stabilize patients but also to begin treatments to cure patients.
Step 9  Review Practice Exercise 1-2

- Check your answers with the Answer Key at the back of this instruction pack. Correct any mistakes you may have made.

Step 10  Let's Take a Walk

- Now that you’ve met the team members you’ll soon be working with, let’s take a walk through the work setting.

A Walk through the Office

Though they might be arranged differently, all medical offices have certain things in common. Each one must be arranged so that patients are comfortable and well attended to. They must also be equipped to handle the variety of tasks performed in the medical office. So, let’s begin our tour!

Reception Area and Waiting Room

What’s the first thing you notice when you walk into a doctor’s office? How many exam rooms are available? What color the doctor’s socks are? Probably not. Most likely, you notice the lighting, the noise level, the furniture and how many people are waiting to be seen. The reception area and waiting room are the medical team’s first chance to make a good impression on patients. These areas have a strong impact on how comfortable patients feel, and physicians go to great lengths to design and decorate these areas to put patients at ease.

Typically, the waiting room will have ample seating, magazines and beverages. Family practitioners and pediatricians will often have a children’s play area to help keep the little ones occupied (and the noise level down). The waiting room is generally located near the front office so the administrative staff is available to assist patients with forms and scheduling.

Front Office

The front office is where all of the patient’s information is initially recorded. Employees in this area need to have good computer skills and must be comfortable operating many kinds of office equipment. Each of these individuals works as a liaison between the patient and the medical staff. Excellent customer service skills and a pleasant demeanor help make everything run smoothly!

All front offices have at least one telephone and one computer.
All front offices have at least one telephone and one computer. Multiple-line telephones help reduce the number of actual phone units while allowing the staff to better manage the incoming calls. Computers help the staff process information quickly and accurately.

**Exam and Treatment Rooms**

Once the patient’s information has been entered into the office’s computer system, it can be easily retrieved from other computers throughout the building. In the exam and treatment rooms, the medical staff can access an individual’s records and history as they care for that person. This helps streamline the information gathering process and can also lessen errors and confusion.

The exam and treatment rooms are the heart of the medical practice—this is where the patient receives the most care. Here you’ll find medical equipment, such as instruments to measure heart rate and blood pressure, weight scales, adjustable lights and devices to examine ears, noses and throats. There is also an examination table that can be adjusted to allow access to the patient while making him as comfortable as possible.

The high volume of people passing through these rooms requires that the medical staff keep them very clean and well organized. Cabinets and drawers hold sterilized supplies that must be handled and disposed of in an appropriate manner. Proper containers and procedures are used to ensure the safety of everyone in the office. And wash sinks and disinfectant soaps are essential to preventing disease transmission.

**Medical Records Storage**

As more and more medical practices use the computer as a records management system, less space is set aside for storing the hard copies of a patient’s medical file. Originals and copies of documents, such as charts and lab results, can now be stored on the computer. This frees up more space for treating patients and speeds up records access.

Many offices use a combination of electronic and physical filing techniques. Some use the computer to store often-needed information while keeping important original documents in a medical records storage area. After a certain amount of time, a few years usually, these records are considered inactive and they can be moved to a more remote area, such as an offsite storage facility.

You’re now familiar with areas that all medical practices, big and small, use to care for their patients. Now, let’s take a look at some of the additional areas that larger practices employ to aid them in meeting the needs of a larger clientele.
Laboratory

Generally, smaller medical practices don’t have the means to perform diagnostic tests onsite. They must contract with independent laboratories, or labs, to run these tests. For smaller practices, the delay in receiving the results is offset by the fact that they don’t have to invest in the costly equipment and technicians required to perform the tests. However, physicians generally want test results as soon as possible, and those in larger practices can afford to house a lab within the office.

In the lab, you’ll find specialized devices and laboratory tools, such as centrifuges and test tubes that are used to perform tests. Once the tests are complete, the information can be added to the computer and then accessed by the appropriate medical staff.

Larger practices can also house a few other areas that smaller ones can’t. Let’s explore these now.

More Treatment Rooms

Patients who once went to the hospital for advanced care can now be treated in the doctor’s office, so many practices have increased the number of treatment rooms available.

These additional rooms can be used for longer visits that would otherwise cramp smaller facilities. And more exam rooms mean more patients can be seen at once, so practices can hire larger medical teams to meet the needs of a greater number of patients.

Business Office

The business office allows the support staff to process client information efficiently. Here, the staff can manage a wide range of administrative duties, including records input, billing, coding and filing insurance claims. The office staff uses medical-specific software to check medical coding, create insurance claim forms and invoices and generate financial reports in the business office.

Just imagine how long it used to take to process bills with only a calculator.
**Lunch—Break Room**

Most practices provide a specific area for employees to relax. Tables and chairs are set up and basic kitchen supplies may be available. A refrigerator and microwave allow the staff to prepare food, and vending machines provide extra convenience. Some form of intercom system is used to keep the front desk receptionist in touch in case the staff members in the break room are needed.

Now that you’re familiar with the building’s different areas and their purposes, it’s time to learn about the characteristics of a successful medical assistant.

### Step 11  Personal Qualities of a Successful Medical Assistant

Rhonda has been a patient care technician for many years. She likes the interaction with patients, but she wants a change in her career. She gets along well with her coworkers and keeps up to date about changes in the healthcare field. She’d like to take on more responsibility and learn more about the front office. Her friend Dee, the MA in their office, seems to be involved in everything. Rhonda thinks that medical assisting might offer what she needs.

Rhonda asks Dr. Taylor for some advice about the role of a medical assistant. He tells Rhonda that he depends heavily on Dee to help him provide good patient care. Dee keeps him on schedule—she reminds him to return phone calls and to get to meetings on time. She keeps one step ahead of him in setting up instruments and equipment for each patient. Many of his patients have remarked about Dee’s professionalism and warmth.

When Rhonda visits with Dee, she finds out that medical assisting is Dee’s second career, too. Dee loves assisting with technical procedures and especially conducting blood tests. She enjoys the variety of skills needed each and every day in a clinic. She can fill in for coworkers in the front or back office, so she’s never without something to do.

What makes Dee so successful as an MA? Is she a genius? Is she born with a special healing touch? Well, no she isn’t. Many people are born with all the personal skills they need to be a great MA. They just need to know which skills to emphasize, and maybe a few less helpful traits to tone down. You’ll find a lot of the skills required are already in your blood!

### What Does a Professional Medical Assistant Act Like?

What makes a top notch medical assistant? Let’s examine some of the most important character traits of a successful MA.

**Curiosity and Drive**

Just like Rhonda in the previous scenario, an MA needs to have a true interest in the field of medicine—the constant desire to follow the ever-changing face of medicine. She has a willingness to open her mind to new information in order to learn new skills and change her life. She’s willing to take a risk and undergo personal change. Well, we already know you have that—you’re taking this course!
Warmth and Confidence

An MA appreciates the satisfaction of caring for others. She constantly interacts with other people—coworkers, doctors, patients and families—so a major factor in her success is a courteous, pleasant manner. She can put a patient at ease by showing warmth and compassion. She is often the one assigned to explain physicians’ instructions. She is confident in her abilities and her understanding of the information she’s explaining.

Organizational and Professional Skills

A successful MA is a multi-tasker. He can handle several responsibilities at once. He makes lists of things to do so he doesn’t forget any of his tasks for the day. He keeps charts and other paperwork organized so that he can find what he needs at a moment’s notice. He keeps his work area clean and tidy so there’s room to work and so he doesn’t lose things. He can prioritize, or decide which duties are more important. “Should I take Mrs. Smith’s vitals first, or should I explain to Tommy how to take care of his cast?”

As you progress through this course, you’ll learn the skills it takes to keep organized and to prioritize.

Professionalism means having the qualities of a highly skilled person. Do you think a person who worked so hard to become good at what she does is going to break the rules, be rude to her employer or spread gossip around the office? Those are all surefire ways to not only ruin her reputation, but also to lose her job! A professional keeps her eyes on the goal ahead—serving her clients, going farther in her career and being the best at what she does. A big part of professionalism in the healthcare world is confidentiality. All medical records, from the patient history form to an x-ray to the doctor’s SOAP notes, are confidential, or something to be kept secret. The professional medical assistant ALWAYS respects the confidential nature of medical information at all times.

Physical Attributes

Since clinical duties require working with precision instruments, a reasonable level of manual dexterity is required. A medical assistant must be able to wrap small items to sterilize in the autoclave, for example. Along the same lines, good vision is necessary to take readings of vital signs correctly or to measure an infant’s head circumference. So an MA keeps her eyewear prescription up to date!

There are other physical attributes of a successful medical assistant that don’t have as much to do with what she’s doing, but with what her physical appearance is saying.
What Does a Professional Medical Assistant Look Like?

Jane entered the Haber Dash Men’s Store to exchange a tie for her husband. As she approached the counter, she saw that two clerks were at either end. She noticed that the younger clerk wore a t-shirt and torn jeans and had a few visible piercings. The other clerk was dressed conservatively in black pants, a starched white shirt and a snazzy bow tie. In a split second, she decided who looked the most helpful. She thought the more conservatively dressed clerk would be more sympathetic to her tie dilemma, so she approached him for assistance.

Has this ever happened to you? Perhaps if Jane wanted advice on which hip hop CD to buy for her son, the other clerk would have appeared more competent. But either way, a judgment was made based on how each employee looked. Of course, no two people look alike, but there are certain factors of appearance that are important in the work setting. This is especially true for a professional healthcare worker.

In a medical setting, patients want to feel that their problems are taken seriously. They feel vulnerable and perhaps a little scared. The more the staff can make patients feel comfortable and cared for, the better patients’ treatment will go. And people tend to feel most comfortable with things they’re familiar with. Let’s examine the parts of a medical assistant’s appearance that could help a patient feel either put off or put at ease.

A Medical Assistant Has Impeccable Grooming

DO’S:

• Follow the dress code set by your employer and don’t test those boundaries. Remember that you represent the physician and the facility.

• Wear clothing that fits—not too big, not too small.

• Dress modestly while on duty—no cleavage or abdomen showing.

• Keep makeup and hairstyles conservative while working.

• Keep jewelry to a minimum while in uniform, for appearance and sanitary reasons.

• Bathe daily and use deodorant.

• Always wear a watch to count pulses, respirations and perform other tests.
Lesson 1—Welcome to the World of Health Care

DON'TS:

- Don't wear clothing with stains, holes or wrinkles.
- Don't keep long hair loose. Keep it tied or pulled back so that it doesn't contaminate a sterile field or otherwise get in the way.
- Don't wear perfumes and colognes, which may cause respiratory difficulty in patients.
- Don't wear open-toed shoes—close-toed shoes protect the feet from spills.
- Don't wear dirty or worn-out shoes to work.

A good rule to keep in mind when you're unsure of a particular look or dress is, “Would I wear this to a job interview with my employer?” If the answer is no, then the decision is made for you.

The Medical Assistant’s Work Ethic

Everyone has a personal code of ethics, how he behaves based on what he thinks is morally right or wrong. When you're performing your duties as a medical assistant, you also need to have a code of ethics to follow. The Code of Ethics and Creed developed by the American Association of Medical Assistants is a good place to start, but it's pretty general. Let's talk about specifics—what are the rules to follow in the medical office? What are you expected to do each and every day to uphold your code of work ethics? Some guidelines are listed below as Do's and Don'ts. Read through the lists and ask yourself why each of these rules can be important to the medical assistant. Then see if you can come up with a few of your own!

DO'S:

- Display your commitment to your career—live a healthy lifestyle yourself.
- Be punctual EVERY DAY.
- Be reliable—the physician should know that you will perform all follow-up with patients, as instructed, and without a reminder.
- Strive to do a complete and accurate job.
- Respect other professionals for their knowledge, just as you expect to be respected.
- Always ask questions if you are unsure of a policy or procedure.
- Be loyal to the physician and other staff members that you work with.
- Keep up-to-date on your skills. Join a professional association to stay informed, take seminars when possible and subscribe to journals about medical assisting.
- Find a trusted, experienced medical professional who can give you advice when you're unsure about what to do.
Introduction to Medical Assisting

DONT’S:
- Don’t share gossip and personal politics at work.
- Don’t share personal problems with your patients.
- Don’t expect to be reminded to perform your duties.
- Don’t speak poorly of the team that you’re a part of, or your patients.
- Don’t break the confidence of patients and their health information.
- Don’t attempt to “wing it.” Wrong decisions can have dire consequences.
- Don’t lie to try to cover up a mistake. Honesty will allow the problem to be solved quickly and with the least amount of damage.

Sounds like a person you can count on, right? If you follow these guidelines, you’ll not only find success as a medical assistant, but in your personal life, as well!

Step 12 Lesson Summary

- You are off and running now! Now you know what your career will be like as you enter the world of medical assisting. Will you be drawn to specialty care? Will you work in a lab or a doctor’s office? All of the other medical personnel need your help. There is a place for each medical assistant, nurse, technician and support staff—each needs the others to provide the standard of healthcare that we have become accustomed to receiving in our country.

In Lesson 2, we’ll go behind the scenes in the medical front office—the business world of medicine. Then we’ll start learning the “language of medicine”—the medical terms that doctors use every day, and soon you will, too! But before you move on, let’s review what you’ve covered in this lesson by completing the following quiz.

Step 13 Mail-in Quiz 1

- Follow the steps to complete the quiz.
  a. Be sure you’ve mastered the instruction and the Practice Exercises that this quiz covers.
  b. Mark your answers on your quiz. Remember to check your answers with the lesson content.
  c. When you’ve finished, transfer your answers to the Scanner Answer Sheet included. Use only blue or black ink on your Scanner Answer Sheet.
  d. Important! Please fill in all information requested on your Scanner Answer Sheet or when submitting your quiz online.
  e. Submit your quiz to the school via mail, e-mail, fax or, to receive your grade immediately, submit your answers online at www.uscareerinstitute.edu.
Lesson 1—Welcome to the World of Health Care

Mail-in Quiz 1

For the following questions, choose the best answer from the choices provided. Each question is worth 3.125 points.

1. An MA can expect to work in any of the following positions EXCEPT _____.
   a. EKG tech
   b. office manager
   c. nurse
   d. podiatry assistant

2. A _____ is a file of all of the patient’s medical history relating to a doctor and their office.
   a. medical record
   b. demographic
   c. New Patient Questionnaire
   d. Health History Form

3. The specialty field that deals with eyes and vision is _____.
   a. urology
   b. OB/GYN
   c. ophthalmology
   d. dermatology

4. Podiatry is a specialty that deals with _____.
   a. skin
   b. diabetes
   c. feet
   d. ears, nose, throat

5. The National Healthcareer Association offers an exam for the _____ certification.
   a. Certified Medical Assistant
   b. Certified Healthcare Worker
   c. Certified Medical Administrative Assistant
   d. Registered Medical Team Member

6. An ENT doctor is a specialist who studies _____.
   a. eyes, not throats
   b. ears, neck, tonsils
   c. eyes, not tonsils
   d. ears, nose, throat
7. **A physician who cares for patients with disorders of the glands is an _____.**
   a. endocrinologist
   b. internist
   c. anesthesiologist
   d. entomologist

8. **A medical coder uses numbers to _____.**
   a. code patient complaints
   b. assign codes to diseases and procedures
   c. code types of specialists
   d. e-mail message codes to insurance companies

9. **PA stands for _____.**
   a. protein allergy
   b. podiatrist’s assistant
   c. payment allowed
   d. physician’s assistant

10. **A rapid screen is _____.**
    a. a credit check on new patients
    b. a test for strep throat that can be performed in the office
    c. taking vital signs as fast as you can
    d. the EMT’s evaluation of an injured patient

11. **The MA dress code should be _____.**
    a. anything as long as it is clean
    b. fashionable and in your best complementary colors
    c. the dress code outlined by your employer
    d. a white lab coat over slacks

12. **A well-groomed, professional MA makes the patient _____.**
    a. certain that they are being paid too much
    b. confident in their health care
    c. nervous
    d. disinterested
13. **One factor in the increase in demand for medical assistants is** _____.
   a. they are so versatile
   b. they want less work
   c. it looks good on the application
   d. it’s similar to CNA

14. **Being willing to work in either the front office or back office demonstrates that the MA is** _____.
   a. restless and distracted
   b. not very good at either
   c. not ambitious
   d. flexible and versatile

15. **Chief complaint means** _____.
   a. what is wrong
   b. the complaint with the most letters in it
   c. how long the patient waited to be seen
   d. what the MA thinks is the worst symptom

16. **Delegating means** _____.
   a. separating items
   b. assigning duties
   c. making deals
   d. doing it yourself

17. **The SOAP format refers to the** _____.
   a. order of dictating that doctors use in recording a patient visit
   b. disinfecting solution for instruments
   c. rule of calculating drug dosages
   d. type of filing system

18. **A code of work ethics is/are** _____.
   a. the rules in the office manual
   b. the code used to bill for the doctor’s services
   c. a list of rules that are too general to use every day
   d. how you behave in the workplace based on what you think is morally right or wrong
19. A medical assistant's work attire should be _____.
   a. all white
   b. tailored and designer label
   c. clean, wrinkle-free, proper size, professional
   d. whatever style you like best

20. The reason you have to wear close-toed shoes on duty is _____.
   a. open-toed shoes are not in style 12 months of the year
   b. to protect your toes from spills, or other dropped items
   c. so athlete's foot germs can't get out
   d. because toes are ugly

21. You need to wear a watch every day because _____.
   a. most clinics don't have clocks in the exam rooms
   b. most patients don't wear a watch to the doctor
   c. you will need it to count pulses or respirations
   d. the doctor depends on you to tell her the time regularly

22. Long hair needs to be pulled back because _____.
   a. it is a tradition for medical personnel to wear a ponytail or bun
   b. it's the law
   c. that is what is most popular with patients
   d. it can contaminate a sterile field or get in the way of procedures

23. Demographic information pertains to _____.
   a. medical history
   b. previous doctor's name and address
   c. name, address, city and phone numbers
   d. education

24. An oncologist deals with _____.
   a. cancer
   b. occupational health
   c. orthopedics
   d. otolaryngology

25. A medical assistant may be certified _____.
   a. by the NHA or the NCCT
   b. by the NHA or the AMA
   c. before completing any training
   d. to work as an EMT
26. Physicians who can afford to have a(n) ____ in the medical office save time on diagnostic tests.
   a. lunch/break room
   b. medical records storage
   c. exam and treatment room
   d. laboratory

27. The ____ is where you’ll find original copies of important documents.
   a. lunch/break room
   b. medical records storage
   c. exam and treatment room
   d. laboratory

28. The ____ is where you’ll relax when it’s time for a break.
   a. lunch/break room
   b. medical records storage
   c. exam and treatment room
   d. laboratory

29. The ____ houses medical equipment, an exam table and cabinets for supplies.
   a. lunch/break room
   b. medical records storage
   c. exam and treatment room
   d. laboratory

30. Records input, billing, coding and filing claims takes place in the ____.
   a. front office
   b. business office
   c. reception area and waiting room
   d. emergency department

31. The ____ should have ample seating, magazines and a children’s play area.
   a. front office
   b. business office
   c. reception area and waiting room
   d. emergency department
32. Staff in the ____ need to have good computer skills and excellent customer service skills.
   a. front office
   b. business office
   c. reception area and waiting room
   d. emergency department

Endnotes

3 http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos164.html
Congratulations
You’ve completed Lesson 1.

Don’t wait for your quiz results to continue with Lesson 2.