

Preparing to Take the Certification Exam

SECTION



The Certification Process and the Exam

CHAPTER

1

If you are reading this book, you are getting ready to take either the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) Certified Medical Assisting (CMA) Exam or the American Medical Technologists (AMT) Registered Medical Assisting (RMA) Exam. If you are a recent graduate of a medical assisting program, taking the exam as soon after graduation as possible is important. If you are a practicing CMA who is taking the exam, the likelihood is that you are taking the exam again because you did not keep up on your continuing education units. Why take the exam at all? There are several reasons:

- Passing a national certification exam demonstrates to patients, employers, and others that you have learned a standardized body of knowledge. Many physicians will only hire individuals who have passed one of the two exams.
- If you move, you do not have to apply for a separate certification—both the CMA and the RMA are recognized by employers throughout the United States.
- Larger medical group practices may be affiliated with local hospitals and may be required to meet Joint Commission standards. The credentials of all staff are inspected. Although the Joint Commission does not currently require that all medical assistants be certified, having certified staff is looked upon favorably.
- Because passing the certification exam(s) requires that you study and are up-to-date on current standards, you can take pride in your certification.

THE NATIONAL EXAMS

As mentioned earlier, two organizations offer nationally recognized medical assisting examinations. Both are highly respected professional organizations. The exam format is similar, using only multiple choice questions, and the content covered on the exams is similar. The difference is the eligibility criteria for each exam. Whether you take from the AAMA or the AMT depends on whether you meet the admission criteria. It also may be that one credential is better recognized in your area.

American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) Certification Exam

The American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) is the professional organization representing medical assistants throughout the country. Individuals who pass the AAMA exam earn a CMA (AAMA). This credential is recognized throughout the United States. Once they have earned the credential, individuals must be recertified every five years by continuing education or reexamination. This recertification is to demonstrate competency and knowledge in the field. All CMA (AAMA)'s must

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either take the exam again after five years or provide proof of 60 continuing education units to the AAMA. The specific information about recertifying by continuing education is available on the AAMA website (<http://www.aama-ntl.org>).

To be eligible to take the AAMA exam, candidates must meet one of the following conditions:

- *Category 1:* This is for the graduating student or recent graduate of a medical assisting program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) or by the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES). Students must be within 30 days of completing their education and externship to take the exam.
- *Category 2:* This category is for the individual who is not a recent graduate of a CAAHEP or ABHES accredited program. If you graduated more than 12 months prior to the exam date, you are considered a nonrecent graduate. The fee for the examination may be higher if you are not a member of the AAMA. You must submit a transcript with proof of graduation.
- *Category 3:* The last category is for individuals who are already CMA (AAMA)s and are applying to recertify the credential. You must submit a copy of a current provider-level CPR and a copy of your current CMA (AAMA) certificate.

The AAMA certification exam is offered in a variety of locations throughout the year. It is very important that you review the current *Candidate Application and Handbook* in detail. This handbook provides the latest information on the steps you need to follow to take the exam as well as the application that must be completed. The timing of your application to take the exam is important. If you are planning to take the exam soon after graduation, you must apply no less than five months in advance of the date you will complete your medical assisting program.

The exam consists of 200 multiple choice questions. The content of the exam is outlined in the *Handbook* in detail. You should be prepared to answer questions on all of the topics outlined.

The current exam is administered in two 80-minute segments, with an optional 20-minute break between segments. The entire exam is taken on a computer, so you must be comfortable with test taking on a computer. You can use the CD that accompanies this book for practice, but the actual computerized format for the test will probably be different than the format on the CD.

American Medical Technologists (AMT) Certification Exam

The American Medical Technologists (AMT) is a nonprofit certification agency and professional membership association representing a variety of healthcare professionals. AMT's mission is to issue certification credentials to medical and dental assistants, clinical laboratory personnel, laboratory consultants, and allied health instructors. AMT is recognized throughout the country, as is its Registered Medical Assistant (RMA (AMT)) credential. Once they have passed the exam, RMA (AMT)s must maintain their credential by providing proof of 30 points of continuing education every 3 years. Check the AMT website (<http://www.amt1.com>) for more information about maintaining continuing education credits.

There are three different categories of eligibility to be considered for the AMT examination:

- *Category 1:* The applicant must be a graduate of, or scheduled to graduate from, a medical assistant program that is accredited by CAAHEP or ABHES *or* a medical assistant program in a postsecondary school or college that has institutional accreditation by a regional accrediting commission, or by a national accrediting organization approved by the U.S. Department of Education. The program must include a minimum of 720 hours (or equivalent) of training in medical assisting skills (including a clinical externship). If you graduated within the last three years, proof of work experience is *not required*. If you graduated over three years ago, you will be required to show proof of current work experience. Your program chair will know if you are graduating from an appropriately accredited program.
- *Category 2:* If you are a graduate of a formal medical services training program of the U.S. Armed Forces, you are eligible to take the exam.

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- *Category 3:* You may register for the exam if you have been employed in the profession of medical assisting for a minimum of five years, no more than two years of which may have been as an instructor in the postsecondary medical assistant program. Proof of current work experience and high school education or equivalent is needed. Employment dates must be within the last five years.

The areas covered in the RMA examination differ slightly from the CMA exam. The examination is usually 200 questions. The AMT offers both a pencil and paper test and a computerized version of the exam. It is important that you check the AMT website for specific information about the exam.

SUMMARY

Congratulations for taking the next step in your professional career by taking a certification exam. You must begin preparing for the exam long before the actual date. Chapter 2 provides you with some study tips. It is also important that you carefully review the candidate handbook and instructions for either exam. The exam process is clearly outlined in the individual handbook.

