

Southern Maine Community College Medical Assisting Program

Occupational Risks

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Medical Assisting is a profession with many rewards, as practitioners can perform both administrative and clinical services, filling several roles in a variety of healthcare environments. The Bureau of Labor Statistics clearly outline that it is a growth field, with an anticipated 18% growth from 2020 to 2030.

Medical Assistants work directly with providers and patients, with the goal of providing healthcare and ensuring patient safety. It is a position with a great deal of responsibility.

As with any healthcare position, there are certain occupational risks that come into play with being a medical assistant, and those hazards include the following:

➤ Exposure to infectious diseases

Infectious Diseases in the Allied Health professions students should be aware that during the course of subsequent employment, they would be working in situations where exposure to infectious diseases is probable. This is an occupational risk for all healthcare workers. Persons should not become healthcare workers unless they recognize and accept this risk. Proper education and strict adherence to well-established infection control guidelines, however, can reduce the risk to a minimum. Thorough education in infection control procedures is an integral part of this Medical Assisting program and other medical programs here at SMCC. Classroom education given several times in many courses over this exposure including how to protect oneself.

➤ Sharps injuries

Poor practices of improperly working with sharp objects can danger oneself or others. Sharps are an injury threat, but once contaminated with blood or bodily fluids they may be a health threat as well. Safety devices are present on all needles or sharps used in the MA classroom along with appropriate sharps disposal containers. SMCC has an exposed protocol policy for a needle injury.

➤ Bloodborne pathogens and biological hazards

Biological hazards are diseases producing agents (pathogens) that can be transmitted to individuals through various routes of exposure or what we often refer as modes of transmission. As a medical assistant exposure to these hazards may result in acute or chronic health conditions. Bloodborne pathogens are infectious microorganisms in human blood that can cause disease in humans. These pathogens include, but are not limited to Hepatitis B (HBV) hepatitis C (HCV), and human immunodeficiency virus.

➤ Chemical exposures

Disinfectants, cleaning products, hazardous drugs, and some pesticides used in the healthcare setting may be harmful to health workers. Cleaning agents, disinfectants, bleach, and

glutaraldehyde have been associated with an increased risk of asthma among medical workers. Preventive measures such as unnecessary chemicals or substituting with equally effective and less toxic chemicals.

➤ Ergonomic hazards from lifting repetitive tasks

Ergonomics is the science of fitting jobs to workers instead of trying to get the worker to fit the job. Ergonomics is important because when you are doing a job and your body is stressed by awkward posture, extreme temperature, or repeated movement of your musculoskeletal system is effective. These hazards include overexertion and repetitive stress that can develop injuries that affect muscles tendons, ligaments, nerves, discs, and blood vessels. In the proper use of needles, scissors can result in cuts, puncture wounds, and increase the risk of infections.

➤ Latex allergies,

Exposure to latex potential students should be aware that exposure to natural rubber latex (NRL) is likely. Individuals exposed to NRL products may develop allergic reactions such as skin rashes; hives; nasal, eyes, or sinus symptoms; and, rarely, shock. Here at SMCC, we take all precautions against this by using no latex products in our clinical labs.

➤ Stress

In healthcare, the healthcare person will encounter many stressful and emotional situations. Including people who have a severe disease or disabilities. Allied healthcare people deal with patients coming from diverse cultures; they work with new technology, or even combat the continuing need for creative problem-solving. Understaffing healthcare facilities puts a heavy burden on the Medical Assistant in the Allied healthcare community. Additional workload, less assistance from others, and pressure to work at an accelerated pace can up the chances of accidents and more emotional stress.

At the same time, there are protections set up with the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), and those protections are particularly important within a healthcare environment. OSHA has a series of standards that protect the safety of healthcare workers and patients.

Accredited medical assisting programs are required to teach students about the hazards that they face on the job and the protocols that can be put into place to ensure a workplace culture that prioritizes safety.