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**A Word About Accreditation**

**By Danni R.**

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ACCREDITED VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMS AND INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION—ON CAMPUS OR ONLINE!

People interested in a medical assistant or similar related career often are unsure of what to look for in vocational training institutions and what they should expect from the program they choose.

It is highly recommended that those who seek formal training opt for accredited training programs that meet the clearly defined and strictly upheld criteria of one of the regional or national accreditors. Finding out whether a school or online course and their programs are accredited is an important step in determining whether the education provided will meet all learning goals and is truly worth the time and money.

**WHAT IS ACCREDITATION?**

In the United States most accreditations are granted by the government, approved state agencies, or organizations, and associations that rely on a variety of advisory groups in their continuous effort to improve the safety and quality of education and training provided to the public. In addition, most states have some means of approving or certifying the operation of independent and other nonpublic schools.

The U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) are accreditors for postsecondary programs, the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) is the largest specialized accreditor in the health sciences field, the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES) accredits private postsecondary institutions and programs preparing individuals for entry into the medical assisting profession, and the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) strives to continuously improve the safety and quality of care provided to the public through the provision of health care accreditation and related services that support performance improvement in health care organizations.

## A Word About Accreditation

Graduates of postsecondary medical assisting programs accredited by CAAHEP or ABHES are immediately eligible to take AAMA's Certified Medical Assistant (CMA) certification exam. Graduates from ABHES accredited medical assisting programs are also immediately eligible to take the RMA examination offered by the American Medical Technologists (AMT). Both CAAHEP and ABHES publish a list of their accredited programs.

Accreditation for different level public and private educational institutions, colleges, universities, graduate schools in the United States is divided into geographical areas. There are six regional accreditation bodies: Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA) New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NASC) Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)

Important is that those seeking medical assistant training should not overlook that an accredited versus a legitimate institution does not always mean the same thing! There is a plethora of different accreditations offered in the United States covering all imaginable areas of vocational and higher education. Some institutions claiming these accreditations are not necessarily always legitimate. Only fully accredited institutions have the above listed accreditations.

### A WORD OF CAUTION ABOUT ONLINE TRAINING!

Distance education over the Internet provides e-learners with the convenience, flexibility, and the ability to study anywhere, any time without being on campus. However, taking courses online doesn't always mean that the program they have chosen is accredited or legit and sometimes, if not careful, the diploma they receive is not even worth the paper it is printed on.

Online training providers, non-traditional universities, and colleges who offer virtual and distance learning programs have different accreditation standards and it is important to recognize the difference between legitimate and fully accredited vs. illegitimate and non-accredited ones before signing up for such courses.

The Internet is known for their many different types of scams. To ensure that you don't waste your time or money, medical assistant students should choose only institutions that have full accreditation!

In closing, one final word of caution: training programs, especially those offered on the Internet, that use words such as approved, accredited, accreditation pending, authorized, chartered, empowered, licensed, recognized, registered, or any other profound sounding designation are not always legitimately accredited. Be aware of these common phrases!

### HELPFUL LINKS:

Danni R. is a certified medical assistant through the AAMA and NHA, and MA Instructor at well known vocational training institutions and online. Her background is a unique blend of healthcare sciences and freelance web design and graphic arts, which makes her the ideal author for medical assisting articles and web sites. It is this fusion of contrasting disciplines that makes her work so successful on

the Internet! You may also visit her web sites at Advanced Medical Assistant of America:

and Medical Assistant Net at

to get

better acquainted with her work!

## **An Online College Education Overview**

**By Steve Gargin**

There has always been a lot of debate as to whether an online college education is as good as a traditional college education. The answer to this is quite simple; there are good institutions that offer an online college education and there are bad establishments that offer an online college education. So, you need to do your research in the same way when you are looking for the best place to pursue your online college education with as you would an offline course.

Of course you are not going to particularly bother finding out about the location of the colleges that offer an online college education because it really doesn't matter. However, a lot of the other points that you would consider before attending a college should also be taken into consideration before you enrol with an organisation offering an online college education.

The growth in the numbers of people pursuing an online college education has led to increased competition amongst institutions to attract students. The best way to assess the credibility of a site advertising the best online college education is to ask about the accreditation of its courses. Accreditation means that a governing body for a particular field has endorsed the course and this is extremely important in helping you to decide who to trust with your online college education. If a course is not accredited then you need to find out why.

There may be a number of courses that have not yet received accreditation from an appropriate association or governing body but still offer a good online college education. For example, the establishment may have applied for accreditation but not yet been assessed, in which case you can actually check with the particular body that they are in the process of assessing the application for accreditation. Another reason may be that there is no appropriate body that the course can be accredited to. This is less likely but is, nevertheless, a valid reason and does not indicate that the course offered is not going to be worth taking to advance your online college education.

If, however, you find that the online college education institution has been refused accreditation they are likely to try to tell you that accreditation is not important. This is quite simply untrue. An online college education from a non-accredited institution is not going to be viewed as highly as one from an establishment that is accredited. Choose where you gain your online college education from with care to ensure that you are not wasting your time and money by having an almost worthless qualification.

Steve Gargin is the administrator of

a website dedicated to  
updating you on all aspects of college life.

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