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Succeeding In An Externship

By Danni R., CMA, CCMA, CMAA

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Some people aren't familiar with the term externship. Your externship is the final step of your medical assisting training. An externship has to do with YOU! It means you finally get a chance to put everything learned in the classroom to use, dealing with actual patients and medical professionals in an actual medical office environment. Although many students have some apprehension about beginning the externship, once there they find it to be a very rewarding experience.

Usually the teaching staff where you receive your medical assisting training makes all necessary arrangements to set you up with a suitable externship site. Usually, a medical assisting education program must provide its students with an externship experience of at least 160 hours. The school has an already established contact list of possible externship sites. Sometimes you get to submit your "dream, or wish list" where you can name a couple offices or specialties that you would really love to do. At my school, for example, to be sent to attend to patient's needs at the local medical center's day stay program, or dialysis was highly desired. The externship is an important part of the transition from student to qualified medical assistant.

Shortly before it is time to begin the externship, you may be asked to interview with the physician or office manager at the facility. Treat this interview exactly as if it were an actual job interview. Dress appropriately and professionally, and always take a resume, even if the school has forwarded one to the clinic. Compile a list of all the addresses, telephone numbers, and names of the supervisors and businesses you have previously worked for. Do not appear unprepared by having to ask for a phone book to look up information if asked to complete an application for employment. Once a good match is determined, a date will be set for the externship to begin.

The externship is designed for several purposes. You expected to perform duties that were learned in school, as well as to learn and refine new skills that are taught by the medical office staff. The ability to perform is important, but equally of value is your ability to be a good team member. You must use appropriate interpersonal skills, have a professional appearance, and display a good attitude. The

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externship gives you the opportunity to prove your dependability. Attendance and punctuality are indicators of reliability and dependability. You must be willing to help with the smaller duties, like pulling and filing patient's charts, and sometimes answer the phones, as well as the more critical ones, like assisting with patient intake and doing basic clinical procedures.

Remember, while performing the externship, you are a guest at the facility, and will be expected to follow the same office policies that the employees do. It is recommended that you read the office policy handbook during the first few days and note any memos on the bulletin boards. Also, make sure you know how to locate emergency equipment, emergency exits, fire extinguishers, and emergency telephone numbers.

As with any new employee, you may be given the simpler duties on the first few days of the externship

so that an evaluation can be made as to whether you can follow simple directions and work efficiently. However, the duties and responsibilities should increase in importance as the externship progresses. If not, you should speak with the externship supervisor to determine if there is a reason why more responsibility is not being offered. It is important that you be able to accept constructive criticism and change any habits that might be unacceptable on the externship site. Once people in charge of you are confident of your abilities to perform certain tasks, they will let you do them without asking, so, make it your goal to observe, learn all you can about unfamiliar procedures, and ultimately, perform certain tasks without being asked!

You must wear appropriate work attire, such as a uniform that identifies you as a student, or our own scrubs, wearing an identification badge. Medical assistants are expected to have a neat, clean, professional appearance. Do not gossip, complain, interrupt, or insist that the office is performing a skill differently than you learned in school. You should not have excessive personal phone calls on the site. If there are problems on the externship, you should first speak to the site supervisor, and if no resolution is obtained, the school supervisor should be involved. You must learn to communicate with supervisors and not allow problems to go unresolved. You should not ask or expect the physician to treat you or your family if an illness should occur during the externship period. Do not expect or ask the physician to dispense any medications from the office. Also remember that confidentiality guidelines apply to the externship student. No information regarding a patient should be discussed outside the office for any reason.

By following professional guidelines and being willing to learn, you will find the externship to be a positive learning experience. Remember, the externship will in most cases be the first job reference in the medical field, so do a good job! Be sure to leave a few copies of your resume with the externship office so that if job opportunities arise later, or if the staff is aware of a position in another facility, they will be able to pass your resume along and assist you in the job search process. It is acceptable to ask for a letter of reference from the externship site supervisor or physician. Be sure to send the externship office a "thank you" note for allowing the externship in their facility. This makes a good impression and will express your appreciation for the opportunity to learn in the facility. By adhering to these suggestions, you will find the externship experience to be one of great value.

Now, the time has come to find a job! Good luck!

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Danni R. is a certified medical assistant through the AAMA and NHA, and MA Instructor at such well known vocational training institutions. 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 online courses. It is this fusion of contrasting disciplines that makes her work so successful on the Internet!

Overcoming Obstacles On Your Path To Success

By Noel Peebles

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Every great athlete, businessperson, or great individual had to stretch and reach for his or her goals. They know that obstacles are a part of the goal achievement process and so they focus on succeeding rather than on what may be keeping them from succeeding. It means overcoming hardships and setbacks, rather than giving up at the first sign of opposition or misfortune. To do this you have got to be willing to take some calculated risks and be prepared to fall down from time to time.

As kids we made mistakes all the time, that's how we learnt. However, as adults we have a thing called "pride" and we hate making mistakes. Think of when you first learnt to ride a bike – you fell down, you got up, you fell down, you got up, and you kept getting up until you mastered it. You didn't give up. If one way didn't work you tried another way until you finally got the hang of it.

The only way you can lose is to stop trying. Every time you have a go, you learn new ways to do things. For example, when I first started to use a computer I was terrified I would press the wrong keys or click the mouse in the wrong place. By comparison my young niece would click on anything. Yes, she did get into problems from

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time to time, but she was learning from her mistakes. The thought of failure didn't seem to worry her and in no time she became very proficient on the computer. I got there too, but by the slower route.

The lesson for me; was that each attempt was not a failure, but simply another step forward...a learning experience leading to my ultimate success.

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