

INDUSTRY
INSIGHTS

The Meaningful Use Rule and Medical Assistants

American Medical Technologists provides certification that benefits patients and the entire healthcare team.



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The US Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services published a 'meaningful use rule' that establishes specific requirements for using electronic health records (EHRs). To learn more about this rule and its impact on medical assistants, Medical Economics talked with Jill Carlson, a registered medical assistant. She is also the Office Manager and Medical Assistant at Friend Health Care in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES) Commissioner holding the seat of Practitioner in Specialty Area.

Medical Economics: What is 'meaningful use'?

Jill Carlson: The meaningful use rule is part of a larger federal program that gives incentives to doctors' offices and hospitals to make the most of their medical health records. There's been a lot of talk about this rule, because it brings big changes to the industry. The meaningful use rule is intended to help doctors' offices and hospitals become more efficient and provide higher quality patient care. In short, healthcare professionals and hospitals can qualify for Medicaid and Medicare incentives if they can demonstrate they are meaningfully using EHRs and incorporating them into their workflow.

Medical Economics: How does this affect medical assistants?

Jill Carlson: One of the final two-stage core objectives of the meaningful use rule allows credentialed medical assistants to enter physician orders into the computerized physician order entry system for medication, laboratory and radiology services. This is a key change, because previously only licensed providers could do these entries. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services understood that delegating this task to the medical assistants would increase efficiency and free up nurses and doctors to spend more time with their patients. However, only certified medical assistants would be allowed to perform this critical function; therefore, many current medical assistants and those studying to become medical assistants will need to become certified to meet this change in the job requirement.

Physicians can realize an enormous cost savings by employing credentialed medical assistants to help their offices comply with the meaningful use rule. By having credentialed medical assistants, doctors will be able to examine, interact with and answer questions from their patients better, because the doctors will not be attempting to enter data into the computer during the office visit.

Medical Economics: What is the role of a medical assistant in today's healthcare environment?

Jill Carlson: Good medical assistants are a physician's best ally, really, because they work so closely with doctors and are involved in so many aspects of the management of the of-

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office. Medical assistants not only know drug representatives and patients by name, but at many times they can finish their doctor's sentences as well. Medical assistants are so valuable because they receive training that teaches them to run the front and back office, work on insurance codes and claims, and schedule appointments and procedures. They can also give injections, authorize medication refills, take vital signs and patient histories, and assist physicians with in-office procedures. In short, medical assistants are the most versatile member of the medical team, and their close working relationship with their physicians enables them to fulfill both the doctor's and the patient's needs.

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Medical Economics: *What can employers do to help their medical assistants become certified?*

Jill Carlson: That's a question that we're hearing from a lot of doctors. In many cases, these doctors have dedicated staffs that have been with them for a very long time. These doctors want to know what they can do to help those they trust and rely upon to comply with the meaningful use rule. Doctors should really see this as an opportunity to strengthen their practice. Imagine the benefit of having all of your staff credentialed. I believe that doctors should be supportive of this change. They should focus on the positive outcomes of a more widespread certification among medical assistants.

One way that doctors and other employers can do that is to help their medical assistants get the proper credentials. American Medical Technologists—AMT, a nationally and internationally recognized certification and membership organization that represents more than 60,000 certified members in the allied-health profession—offers a registered medical assistant or RMA certification that meets the standards established under the meaningful use rule.

AMT offers options for physicians who want to help their non-credentialed medical assistants get certified. AMT's eligibility requirements allow an individual who has worked as a medical

assistant for five years or more to qualify to sit for the registered medical assistant exam. AMT also offers study tools, such as detailed exam outlines and practice tests to increase testing knowledge and confidence. In fact, there are many advantages to working with AMT. AMT-credentialed medical assistants are at the top of their field. They're committed to the profession and dedicated to maintaining high-quality work.

Medical Economics: *Aside from the authorizations related to meaningful use, what are the other advantages of becoming certified by AMT?*

Jill Carlson: American Medical Technologists is much more than a certifying agency for allied-health professionals. AMT is a lifelong career partner, industry advocate and professional education specialist.

AMT is also affordable. Over the course of time, attaining and keeping AMT certification costs less than other certifying bodies. I've heard that when allied-health professionals look into getting certified, they consider other agencies, and they choose AMT because of its national and international reputation for promoting excellence and because employers respect AMT certification.

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Medical Economics: *Is there anything else that you can tell me about American Medical Technologists?*

Jill Carlson: I like American Medical Technologists because it stands for the allied-health professional. As a matter of fact, American Medical Technologists is run by its members. It is not a board of physicians or somebody else out there; it is the members—the members are the board members and members of the committees—and I think that is what makes AMT stand apart from everybody else.

For medical assistants looking to get certified or physicians who want to help their existing staff get certified to comply with the meaningful use rule, you can learn more about the certification process by visiting www.americanmedtech.org/getcertified.