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The Feasibility of Increasing Enrollment in Community College Medical Assistant Training Programs to Meet Growing Demand

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The Feasibility of Increasing Enrollment in Community College Medical Assistant
Training Programs to Meet Growing Demand

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Abstract

Effective and affordable medical assistant training programs are necessary to support the increased need for medical assistants in healthcare. Unfortunately, the path to becoming a medical assistant can be very difficult, time consuming and expensive. Career education programs in high schools and community colleges help all students obtain an education, including technical training and preparation for the workplace. California Community Colleges have historically trained medical assistant students. Although affordable, these inflexible, lengthy and limited capacity programs have created a demand for alternative training programs. For-profit predatory training programs have filled the void to help meet the demand for medical assistants. A review of the relevant literature defines demand and training options currently available. Interview data collected from key informants, which included community college administrators, currently employed medical assistants and human resource healthcare professionals/educators, helped to assess challenges in offering modified programs at the community college level. The result of this study may provide information on whether a modification of community college training programs will result in more medical assistant graduates.

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

America has an emergency on her hands with an aging population! By 2029, the last of the Baby Boomers, which are defined as individuals born between 1946 and 1964, will reach retirement age and “the number of Americans 65 or older will climb to more than 71 million, up from about 41 million in 2011, a 73 percent increase, according to US Census Bureau estimates” (Barr, 2014). At the same time, the fastest growing segment of our population will be 85 or older. Seniors have much higher utilization of healthcare services and demand for healthcare services and workers will increase. The demands on our healthcare system and the workers to provide services to the aging population will be tremendous. The healthcare delivery system (hospitals, physicians, care homes, nurses, and support personal) will be taxed to the limit to provide support to this population (Barr, 2014).

According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, physician demand continues to grow faster than supply leading to a projected total physician shortfall of between 61,700 and 94,700 physicians by 2025. (*Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand: Projections from 2014 to 2025*, 2016, p.4). A key member of the patient healthcare team is the medical assistant. These low cost, but very effective members of the healthcare team function as extenders and allow the higher cost physician to be more productive and see more patients. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the need for medical assistants is anticipated to increase by 29+ percent over the next 10 years, which is much faster than the average for all occupations. (“Medical Assistants: Occupational Outlook Handbook: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics,” 2014.) There is a shortage of affordable medical assistant training programs to meet this growing need. Without an adequate supply of these essential members of the healthcare team, physicians and other healthcare providers will be less efficient and unable to keep up with demand for their services. It is absolutely essential that expanded access to affordable medical assistant training options be made available to meet the increased need for medical assistants in healthcare.

Background and History

With passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010, more people have gained access to healthcare. As the baby boomer population ages, more people will require healthcare intervention. Experts believe demand will result in major increase in healthcare job openings (Katz, August 29, 2013). One critical

category that is expected to be in high demand is the Medical Assistant (*Medical Assistants: Occupational Outlook Handbook 2016-2017 Edition: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016*). Medical assistants provide entry level, but essential and affordable support to the healthcare team, functioning as extenders while enabling more expensive healthcare professionals to increase efficiency and see more patients. Medical assistants work in physician offices, nursing homes and hospitals and are responsible for direct patient care, such as taking vital signs, drawing blood, administering medication, administrative tasks, and support to the physician and nurse (Bureau of Labor Statistics," 2014).

Currently there is a shortage of medical assistants. In order to prepare for this demand, accessible, reliable and credible training programs are required. Unfortunately, the path to a medical assistant training can be very difficult and expensive. California Community Colleges have historically trained medical assistant students ("Demand- Meeting the Growing Need for U.S Health Care Workers," 2013, p. 21-26). Although the community college programs provide high quality applicants, this year-long, daytime programs make it difficult for students to continue working while enrolled and admission is limited. For example, in some colleges like the Los Rios Community College District in the Sacramento area, 26 students graduate annually. Lack of student slots has created a demand for alternative training programs. For-profit technical colleges have proliferated to fill that void. Over the past two decades, the community college market share in providing healthcare education has declined. Between 1986 and 2010, the market share of community college sub-baccalaureate healthcare credentials has declined by 45 percent, and for profit colleges have gained this market share ("Demand- Meeting the Growing Need for U.S Health Care Workers," 2013, p. 21-26). This trend shows a distinct mismatch between the community college mission to provide technical/certificate training and actual outcomes. Community college training programs must be modified to ensure they provide an attractive alternative to for-profit training programs. The economic advantage of some college after high school results in much greater income earning ability and community college programs are well situated to provide training, if students perceive their program offerings as an attractive alternative to for-profit institutions (Carnevale & Smith, 2013,).

According to Kevin Fleming in a scholarly paper, titled: "Success in the New Economy: How prospective college students can gain a competitive advantage" our "educational systems need to be

better aligned to produce the type of workers needed by society. Investments in career education programs in high schools and community colleges will help all students obtain an education which includes technical training and preparation for the workplace. Ultimately, this is how all students can be successful" (Fleming, 2012). Although there is recognition that community college is the pipeline to certificate programs, there is misalignment currently between community college availability and what programs are needed by society. The Federal Government is stepping in to facilitate alignment between community colleges to collaborate with healthcare providers, local workforce, and community based organizations to "develop and validate competency models and career pathways so that individuals can earn family-sustaining wages" (Hope Street Group,2016-2017). Hope Street Group is working with Los Rios Community College District to facilitate: "Increased career advancement for individuals in the healthcare industry; A more skilled, qualified workforce that meets the needs of employers; More efficient and transparent hiring processes adopted by employers; Improved quality of care provided at healthcare institutions (Hope Street Group,2016-2017).

For-profit schools offer medical assistant training programs, which can cost \$20,000-\$30,000+. This cost is comparable to the annual cost at the University of California ("Medical Assistant Training Programs & Schools | Carrington College," 2016). For-profit colleges, being profit motivated, employ aggressive recruiting techniques, often enrolling unqualified students, who are either unable to finish the program, pass the certification exam or obtain gainful employment ("Colleges Sanctioned by Government Organizations," 2016). Students are also saddled with long term debt due to high tuition costs, and relatively low medical assistant wages (Katz, August 22, 2013). Medical assistants earn on average \$29,370, and as such, a more affordable educational pathway is needed ("Medical Assistants: Occupational Outlook Handbook: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics," 2014). Adult education programs offer a variety of medical assistant training classes, but do not have enough capacity to meet the coming demand.

Community colleges have historically played a key role in training healthcare workers. However, their market share has declined by 45 percent, while for profit institutions have gained market share. Due to budgetary constraints and slow response to market forces, community colleges have not adjusted with

the times. Although geographically well-distributed and with existing infrastructure, community colleges have not marshaled their inherent power to cater to the needs of students and are not producing enough graduates to keep up with projected demand. Students are choosing more expensive for profit institutions, which now provide nearly half (48 percent) of sub-baccalaureate health care credentials ("Demand- Meeting the Growing Need for U.S Health Care Workers," 2013, p. 21-26). Adult education or vocational programs are too small and geographically limited to provide the level of training necessary to meet the projected need for medical assistants.

Purpose and Goal of this Study

The Placer School for Adults was selected as the model program for this research study as it provides expedited, affordable, but limited capacity, night time medical assistant classes allowing students to work while completing the program. The Los Rios Community College was selected as the test subject for this study, since there is not an equivalent expedited program to cater to the needs of working adults. Utilizing Los Rios Community College resources to provide training options modeled after the Placer Adult Education Model may appeal to working adults wishing advancement and income growth or newly graduated high school students who lack resources or commitment to pursue a traditional 4-year college program.

The main goal of this research study is to determine whether or not the development and provision of an expedited 18 week evening/weekend community college medical assistant training program would result in an increase of successful graduates, thereby addressing the growing demand for these healthcare extenders in our community.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The main research question explored in this study was: If Los Rios Community College District offered a medical assistant training program modeled after Placer School for Adult's affordable and effective alternative, including expedited night and daytime classes, would more students enroll, graduate with less debt and be able to fill the projected need for these healthcare extenders. I selected this main research question due to the compelling statistics regarding growth in the need for medical assistants.

Community colleges have historically provided affordable and accessible certificate programs. The value of this research depends upon the ability or willingness of Los Rios Community College District to modify their existing program by adopting at least some characteristics of the Placer School for Adults program. By adopting some characteristics, the program may attract more students and produce more graduates.

The research hypothesis for this study is:

Hypothesis: To meet the increased need for medical assistants, community college programs should be modeled after The Placer School for Adults medical assistant training program to: (1) increase enrollment; (2) provide students with an expedited, affordable course of instruction; and (3) meet the current and future demand for medical assistants.

Scope and Limitations:

This study is will be limited to the medical assistant training programs located in the greater Sacramento/Placer, California area. Due to the short amount of time available to complete data collection, interviews will be limited to three key informants' interviews, who will represent Los Rios Community College, Placer School of Adult Education, and a healthcare resource director and educator. In addition, I will undertake a survey of currently employed medical assistants at Sutter Medical Foundation in Sacramento, California. The analysis and conclusions will be limited by the information provided by these key informants and survey participants. Because of the geographic limitations of study area and participants, the results may not be representative of a more geographically expansive study. Further research may need to be undertaken to obtain more nationally relevant data and study results.








CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

The objective of this literature review is to present a summary of scholarly journals and publications regarding the demand for healthcare workers, particularly medical assistants. Medical assistants are unique. Although entry level and moderately compensated, they perform essential support to the health care team which creates efficiency. There are major concerns about the ability to keep up with the demand for these healthcare workers due to the lack of reasonably priced programs (commensurate with their earning potential) that can graduate and produce sufficient numbers to support the growing demand. The major themes of this chapter include discussion regarding: (1) defining the role of the medical assistant which is driving physician efficiency and reasons for increased demand for these healthcare workers, (2) obstacles to affordable, accessible medical training programs.

The role of the medical assistant and reasons for increased demand for these healthcare workers:

Medical assistants are entry level healthcare workers that are employed in physician offices, nursing homes and hospitals and are responsible for direct patient care such as vital signs, drawing blood, administering medication, general medical assistance and administrative tasks, and support to other healthcare providers. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the need for medical assistants is anticipated to increase by 23%(other reference materials site 29%), over the next 10 years, which is much faster than the average for all occupations. The need for accessible, reliable and credible CMA training programs is essential in keeping up with the demand. The graph table listed below from the Bureau of Labor Statistics provides a summary of the medical assistant field ("Medical Assistants: Occupational Outlook Handbook: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics," 2014).

Summary

Quick Facts: Medical Assistants	
2015 Median Pay 	\$30,590 per year \$14.71 per hour
Typical Entry-Level Education 	Postsecondary nondegree award
Work Experience in a Related Occupation 	None
On-the-job Training 	None
Number of Jobs, 2014 	591,300
Job Outlook, 2014-24 	23% (Much faster than average)
Employment Change, 2014-24 	138,900

In “The Journal of Health Organization and Management” medical assistants are described as the invisible “glue” of primary health care practices. This paper includes a study and survey including semi-structured interviews. Survey results revealed great variation in the breadth of tasks medical assistants perform and their training. With expanded use of medical assistants, patient satisfaction, and care team efficiency increased. This article explains the expanded role and need for the medical assistants in medical practices. The authors cite Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), figures regarding the current number of medical assistants employed as well as projections identifying medical assisting to have been among the fastest growing occupations between 2006 and 2016. Yet, training for medical assistants is not standardized and can range from “on-the job” to formal vocational programs varying from 4 to 18 months. As demand for services increase, physicians will hire more assistants to perform routine administrative and clinical duties, allowing the physicians to see more patients and provide affordable care. The researchers identified factors that contribute to efficient reengineering of the healthcare model clearly identifying the essential role of the medical assistant in driving physician efficiency and standardized work (Taché & Hill-Sakurai, 2010, p.1-14)

A major catalyst in the increased demand for healthcare services was implementation of “The Affordable Care Act or Healthcare Reform” on March 23, 2010. The summary describes the goals to reform the health care industry by improving quality, decreasing cost, adding consumer protection and providing increased access to healthcare. The result has been a significant increase in the number of insured in the United States (“Summary of the Affordable Care Act | The Henry J. Kaiser Family

Foundation).

According to Katz, in the “Impact of Obamacare: Job Implications of the Healthcare Reform Bill” as many as 41.3 million Americans will gain access to healthcare. Along with the growth of the aging baby-boom population, demand for healthcare is projected to increase significantly. According to Katz, industry experts believe demand for healthcare services will result in major increases in healthcare job openings, perhaps 250,000 to 400,000 annually over the next ten years. It is anticipated that there will be a need for all types of healthcare providers, starting with physicians and trickling down to support staff such as medical assistants who facilitate patient flow. In order to fill this demand for qualified healthcare providers, there must be a concentrated effort to ensure supply keeps up with demand (Katz, August 29, 2013).

Another significant catalyst in the increased demand for healthcare services and workers is the aging population. As cited by Barr, by 2029, “the number of Americans 65 or older will climb to more than 71 million, up from about 41 million in 2011, a 73 percent increase, according to US Census Bureau estimates.” At the same time, the fastest growing segment of our population will be 85 or older. Seniors have much higher utilization of healthcare services. Demand for healthcare services and workers will increase and appropriate resources must be available to support this population (Barr, 2014).

Obstacles to affordable, accessible Certified Medical Assistant training programs

Medical Assistants are entry level healthcare workers. Their medium wage is moderate. See graph below from the Bureau of Labor Statistics:

Percentile wage estimates for this occupation:

Percentile	10%	25%	50% (Median)	75%	90%
Hourly Wage	\$10.60	\$12.54	\$14.71	\$17.69	\$21.10
Annual Wage (2)	\$22,040	\$26,080	\$30,590	\$36,800	\$43,880

For profit training can cost between \$20,000-30,000 +. These costs can result in high debt

burden for medical assistants with moderate earning potential. For-profit schools typically market to low-income women of color, who depend upon student loans. In many cases for-profits spend more on marketing and recruiting than on the students. For-profit schools appeal to students due to convenient locations and easy access to student loans. "For-profit schools often specialize in short programs focused on preparation for a particular occupation, where public and non-profit sectors are often a gateway to a four-year degree." A federal study of for-profit colleges found that in 2009, the companies spent an average of 42 percent on marketing and non- instruction, compared with 17 percent on students. According to this article, the focus on enrollment expansion has resulted in "recruitment techniques that border on fraudulence." There are many examples of for-profit technical colleges, promising to prepare students for certification and failing to do so. Students are often left in significant debt. One problem is student selection, where aggressive marketing neglects prescreening and leads to unqualified students being enrolled. "For-profit schools also have higher dropout and student loan default rates than nonprofit colleges and universities, and these programs can cost at least four times as much as comparable ones. Students leave for-profit colleges with higher levels of debt than students from other types of institutions and are more likely to default on student loans." For-profit institutions do fill a void that is not met by other institutions according to Deming. For profit institutions seem to attract students that may not be eligible for other programs due to pre-requisites, and students from for-profit colleges had lower earnings and were less likely to be employed when compared to other programs (Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2013, p. 138-144).

Students choose for-profit institutions because they are short programs that are focused on specific skill sets to ready graduates for employment rather than a stepping stone towards an advanced degree. Students often want the quickest path toward gainful employment and may choose this as an efficient option towards accomplishing that goal. For-profit programs are highly fluid and adjust programs to needs of the market, deploying additional instructors, adding new programs, enlarging capacity to meet demand. For-profits fill a void not met by public institutions (Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2013, p. 138-144).

Due to predatory enrollment practices, low graduation rates, and high student default rates, the U.S. Federal Government has taken an active role in targeting for-profit schools by implementing

regulations and sanctioning schools by preventing access to federal financial aid a resulting in a number of for-profit schools closing. Education officials may bar the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS), an agency that accredits the majority of for-profit colleges. Without an accreditation students at those schools would be unable to access federal loans and grants which would effectively drive the schools out of business (Douglas-Gabriel, 2016).

Medical assistants are entry level staff earning a medium annual wage of \$29,370. Although the salary is not considered high, becoming a medical assistant allows workers to move from an unskilled to a skilled field which often can open the door to further advancement (Katz, August 22, 2013).

The Placer School of Adult Education offers an alternative to community college and for-profit schools. Offering a night-time 18 week program (one semester) requiring students to attend two evening sessions per week plus 6 Saturdays. The class size is capped at 12 students and costs \$1,195, plus books and supplies. Students may continue to work during the day as they train for a new career in healthcare. Unfortunately this educational option is centralized in the Placer area. If there were parallel programs offered in convenient locations for students throughout Sacramento area, more students would have the opportunity to enroll. The allure of this program versus community college or for-profit programs is quicker path to graduation and entry into the workforce (Bettencourt, 2014).

According to the “The Community College Journal, “demand for health care workers is expected to increase significantly and community colleges play a key role in training more than half of the nation’s health care workforce. However, the community college role in providing sub-baccalaureate health care credentials has declined by 45 percent, while for profit institutions have gained this market share. According to the author ‘this trend indicates a significant mismatch between job training and job availability. Allied health care professionals run second only to nurses as the segment of the health care workforce trained predominately on community college campuses. “Many non-traditional students who lack the resources or commitment to a 4 year degree may prefer the “learn and earn” character of the practicum training associated with many health care jobs.” Medical assistants require only a post-secondary certificate and are in high demand and are expected to earn good wages compared to comparable jobs in other fields. However, training opportunities at community colleges are not keeping

pace with demand and students are choosing more expensive training options or none at all. "The inability of community colleges to meet the rising demand for health care training has opened up a marketing niche in the private sector. For profit institutions now provide nearly half (48 percent) of sub-baccalaureate health care credentials. The scarcity of community college training programs is, in effect, routing a generation of young people into lower-paying jobs, at the same time that the need for more highly trained health care professionals is on the rise. Few pathways offer better potential than community college training programs that take a relatively short time to equip students for jobs with good earning potential in a rapidly growing sector of the economy, such as is the case with health care" ("Demand-Meeting the Growing Need for U.S Health Care Workers," 2013, p. 21-26).

According to Kevin Fleming in a scholarly paper, titled: "Success in the New Economy: How prospective college students can gain a competitive advantage" discusses the need for our economy and educational system to be better aligned to produce the type of workers needed by society. According to Fleming, "over the last three generations we have gone from 13% of the population stepping into a college classroom, to 60% attending some form of higher education." According to Fleming, the "true ratio of jobs in our economy is 1:2:7. For every occupation that requires a master's degree or more, two professional jobs require a university degree, and there are over half a dozen jobs requiring a 1-year certificate or 2-year degree; and each of these technicians are in very high-skilled areas that are in great demand. Education combined with technical training is how you ultimately secure a competitive advantage in the new economy.

Community colleges are in the ideal position to provide over "70% of tomorrow's workforce with an education combined with applied technical skills, industry driven credentials, and specific preparation for employment. Being a skilled craftsman or technician is highly valued. Investments in career education programs in high schools and community colleges will help all students obtain an education which includes technical training and preparation for the workplace. Ultimately, this is how all students can be successful" (Fleming, 2012).

Los Rios Community College Mission Statement includes their commitment to: "provide outstanding undergraduate education, offering programs that lead to certificates, associate degrees, and

transfer opportunities. Provide excellent career and technical through improved skills and knowledge" (Vision, 2014). Community college program capacity is limited, takes longer to complete due to pre-requisites and may be less attractive to students whose primary goal is to learn a skill and find a job. There is a mismatch between the community college mission to provide degrees which are not perceived as an efficient route to employment (Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2013, p. 138-144).

There is recognition by the Federal Government regarding the need for alignment between community colleges to work collaboratively with healthcare providers, local workforce, and community based organizations to "develop and validate competency models and career pathways so that individuals can earn family-sustaining wages". Hope Street Group is working with Los Rios Community College District to facilitate: "Increased career advancement for individuals in the healthcare industry; A more skilled, qualified workforce that meets the needs of employers; More efficient and transparent hiring processes adopted by employers; Improved quality of care provided at healthcare institutions (Hope Street Group, 2016-2017).

Literature Review Conclusion

This literature review has highlighted a number of key issues regarding medical assistant training programs. It is compelling and concerning that demand for medical assistants is expected to increase faster than most fields. Just as there is a need to ensure sufficient number of physicians to attend to an expanded patient base, there is also need to ensure adequate numbers of medical assistants. According to the "The Community College Journal" these institutions recognize they have a key role in providing training for more than half of the nation's healthcare workforce. Additionally, there is misalignment between the concentrations on advanced level degrees when there is ample data to suggest that more certificate programs graduates are needed to drive our economy. Although community colleges provide training that is affordable, it is not always convenient or efficient for the student. The Federal Government recognizes the need to generate more graduates and is supporting ways to align community colleges, healthcare providers, local workforce, and community based organizations to "develop and validate competency models and career pathways so that individuals can earn family-sustaining wages".

Clearly, for-profit institutions have filled this void. Although much more expensive than either community college or Placer School for Adult's, for-profits are an irresistible alternative to students who wish the fastest path towards graduation and a working career. The long term consequence of for-profit institutions filling this void, results in graduates with unmanageable debt and financial burden. It is clear that if community college programs are able to modify their curriculum, more students would graduate with less debt.

CHAPTER THREE - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As described earlier in this study, the United States requires a steady supply of medical assistants. This study utilized qualitative survey methods to arrive at the data for the findings including key informant interviews and survey questionnaires. A case study was utilized and extensive data was collected from subjects on which the investigation was focused.

1. There is projected growth in demand for the need of medical assistants as physician extenders to care for our aging population as well as and those newly insured due to the Affordable Care Act. The purpose of this project was to examine whether or not a training program modeled from Placer College for Adults could potentially be used at the Los Rios Community College. A qualitative case study research design was used to help better understand the attitudes and opinions regarding medical assistant programs. Specifically, the case study approach provided opportunities for this researcher to observe, interview and survey Placer College for Adults, Los Rios Community College, Healthcare key informants and a sample population of current medical assistants to determine what medical assistant training options, if any, might increase Los Rios Community College enrollment.
2. Increasing Community College enrollment by offering expanded medical assistant training options as more affordable and effective alternative to for-profit training programs.

Main Research Question:

The main research question asked in this study was: If Los Rios Community College District offered a medical assistant training program modeled after Placer School for Adult's affordable and effective alternative, including expedited night and daytime classes, would more students enroll, graduate with less debt and be able to fill the projected need for these healthcare extenders.

Hypothesis: To meet the increased need for medical assistants, community college programs should be modeled after The Placer School for Adults medical assistant training program to: (1) increase enrollment; (2) provide students with an expedited, affordable course of instruction; and (3) meet the current and future demand for medical assistants.

In order to examine this research project thoroughly, this main research question and hypothesis were

developed. Determining whether or not the use of the Placer College for Adult education model could lead to more medical assistant enrollment, this researcher chose to interview Placer College for Adults and Los Rios Community College key informants to obtain to obtain insight into each program, annual graduation rates and success at placing students after graduation. This researcher also interviewed a healthcare key informant to obtain data on recruiting efforts and challenges during a time of increased demand. Finally, this researcher also surveyed 50 currently employed medical assistants to obtain data and trend responses regarding medical assistant training programs, costs, and motivators regarding program selection.

Controlling for Threats to Internal and External Validity

There are potential threats to the study's internal validity. If the survey of currently employed medical assistant and key informant interviews validate the efficacy of modifying community college programs, and enrollment does not increase, the study may be flawed as there may be other factors that were not identified by the surveyor. If on the other hand, enrollment did increase, but at the same time the community college increased outreach efforts, other factors may have contributed to increased enrollment. However, the researcher can be confident the independent variable of modifying the community college program had the anticipated dependent variable of increasing enrollment even if other factors were contributing to the increased enrollment figures.

A threat to external validity would be insufficient sample size (or locally geographically limited) case study participants which may not adequately represent attitudes and survey respondents on a national level. Generalizing from a geographically limited sampling could be a threat to external validity.

Dependent Variable:

The dependent variable for this study is student enrollment of medical assistant students at community college. It is anticipated that if the Los Rios Community College Medical Assistant Training Program is modified it will result in increased enrollment and graduates.

Independent Variable:

The independent variable for this study is the adoption of Placer School for Adults Medical Assistant Training Program by Los Rios Community College. Placer School for Adults has a successful record of enrolling and graduating medical assistant students in an expedited and affordable program that caters to working adults. This study examines the potential affect that the Placer School for Adults medical assistant training program would have on Los Rios Community College should this model be adopted.

Data Collection Plan and Analysis:

Primary Data

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and opinions regarding medical assistant training programs. Qualitative survey methods were utilized. Qualitative data was obtained from interviews and survey questionnaires. Given the short period of time available to conduct research and the subject matter, qualitative survey methods provided the most attainable and comprehensive information to prove or disprove the study hypothesis.

Key Informant Interviews:

Community College Key Informant Interview: A key informant interview was conducted with a dean and program director at Los Rios Community College responsible for program design and focused on topics such as process for adding or modifying programs or certifications, types of programs offered, graduation rates and number of students, outreach/strategies to increase enrollment, challenges in offering their current program, and constraints or barriers to modifying the community college program (See Appendix A for interview questions).

Placer School for Adult Key Informant Interview: A key informant interview was conducted with the Placer School for Adults Principal and instructor and focused on program success, funding, challenges in enrolling students, outreach initiatives, enrollment numbers, capacity, cost, graduation rates, demand, selection criteria, and plans for program expansion (See Appendix B for interview questions).

Healthcare Nursing Resource Director & Healthcare Educator Key Informant Interview: A key informant interview was conducted with a human resource professional and focused on topics such as projected need for Medical Assistants, adequacy of candidates, and barriers regarding recruitment and plans to improve timely recruitment (See Appendix C for interview questions).

Medical Assistant Survey:

Medical Assistant Structured Survey Questionnaire: Survey Monkey a software tool that generates customizable surveys, was utilized to request feedback from (50) currently employed medical assistants. Structured questions with free form comments were utilized to obtain feedback on their personal experience on becoming a medical assistant focusing on areas of inquiry including: age, ethnicity, educational level attained and employment history prior to entering medical assistant training, certification status, motivators for program selection, cost, funding, debt, length of program, impression of program attended, and recommendations and attitudes regarding alternative training options (See Appendix D for survey questions).

Operational Definitions and Data:

Medical Assistants:

Medical assistants complete administrative and clinical tasks in the offices of physicians, hospitals, and other healthcare facilities. Their duties vary with the location, specialty, and size of the practice. Most medical assistants have postsecondary education such as a certificate or associate degree. Others enter the occupation with a high school diploma and learn through on-the-job training. Medical Assistants can be either certified or non-certified. Some employers require Medical Assistants to have completed a formal program and to be certified. Certification demonstrates that the applicant has taken and passed a proctored certification examination.

Projected higher than average growth need for CMA's in healthcare:

Employment of medical assistants is projected to grow 23 percent from 2014 to 2024, much faster than the average for all occupations. The growth of the aging baby-boom population will continue to increase demand for preventive medical services, which are often provided by physicians. In addition, the number of individuals who have access to health insurance is expected to continue to increase because of federal health insurance reform, increasing patient access to medical care (Medical Assistants: Occupational Outlook Handbook 2016-2017 Edition: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).

More Medical Assistants needed:

There is a statistically significant projected 23% increased need for medical assistants. If these suggested changes were made to community college programs, 23% growth in these numbers could be used as the percentage of increased enrollment or graduation numbers required to support my

hypothesis.

Expanded Role and Need for Medical Assistants as Physician Extenders:

As demand for healthcare services increase, so will demand for assistants to perform routine administrative and clinical duties, allowing the physicians to see more patients and provide affordable care. The researchers identified factors that contribute to efficient reengineering of the healthcare model clearly identifying the essential role of the medical assistant in driving physician efficiency and standardized work (Taché & Hill-Sakurai, 2010).

Community College VS for Profit College:

Community colleges train more than half of the entire health care workforce. This article discusses how community college training programs take a short time to equip students for jobs with good earning potential. Community college is a good option for students (including nontraditional students) who lack resources or commitment to a 4 year degree. Community colleges have not kept up with the increased demand for healthcare training which has opened the door to private and for profit institutions. For-profit institutions now provide nearly half pre-bachelor's health care credentials and with them come high student debt, low graduation rates and job placement rates (Carnevale & Smith, 2013).

Non-Profit: Placer School for Adults Certificate Program:

Community based training program primarily focused on assisting working adults or re-entry adults in gaining job skills. Accredited through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). The 18 week evening program costs \$1195, requires 144 hours of classroom instruction. Curriculum is focused on medical assistant skills only, and no pre-requisites other than a high school diploma or GED. Student may work during day work while attending school. Graduation rate is 95% and 20-21 students are enrolled per session. Two sessions are offered per year. Graduates are qualified to take national certification exams: Certified Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA) through the National Healthcare Association (NHA), National Center for Competency Testing (NCCT) or California Certifying Board for Medical Assistants ("Placer School for Adults-Online Catalog- CCMA,").

Community College: Los Rios Certificate Program:

Community college programs are public institutions primarily focused on providing technical training and pre-bachelor degree programs- generally programs are 2 years or less and are more affordable than traditional 4 year colleges or universities. Accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (www.caahep.org). The medical assistant program at Los Rios is 12 months. Tuition and fees: \$1,104, Books and supplies: \$1,746. Los Rios is a 12 month daytime only program which requires pre-requisites prior to enrolling in the program. These requirements extend the length of the program and exclude students who prefer to focus on key training and are not on a path to an associate's degree. Barriers such as limited enrollment capacity, time of program, length of program and pre-requisites cause students to look for alternative training options which better suit their needs. Students cannot work during day while completing program. 26 students graduate per year. Graduates are qualified to take the CMA (AAMA) certification exam administered by American Association of Medical Assistants ("Medical Assisting | CRC Website," 2016).

For Profit: Carrington College- Certificate Program.

For profit institutions are usually owned by shareholders and have a mission to generate profits for shareholders by enrolling as many students as possible at the highest tuition rate the market will support. Often focusing on poor or minority students dependent upon student aid who prefer a less traditional approach to obtain training. Accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) the medical assistant certificate nine month daytime program. Tuition and fees \$27,986. 2014:114 students/ 37% graduation rate/ 67% of graduates are employed in field. Carrington College has multiple campuses in the Sacramento area and will be used as the specific for-profit comparison in this research ("Medical Assistant Training Programs & Schools | Carrington College," 2016).

Externship Programs:

Medical assistants who complete medical assistant training programs will generally work in an unpaid externship for a period of time to obtain unpaid on the job practical training. Although an externship is not required in order to take some certification exams, most employers will not hire a new graduate without some on the job externship experience.

CHAPTER FOUR - RESULTS and FINDINGS

As described above, this research project used a combination of techniques to develop the data and findings for this project. The underlying hypothesis of this research project assumed that to meet the increased need for medical assistants, community college programs should be modeled after “The Placer School for Adults’ medical assistant training program to: (1) increase enrollment; (2) provide students with an expedited, affordable course of instruction; and (3) meet the current and future demand for medical assistants. A qualitative approach was utilized which included a review of relevant literature. In addition a structured electronic questionnaire was developed and utilized as a tool to collect data from currently employed medical assistants. Lastly, a series of personal interviews with key informants representing Los Rios Community College District, The Placer School for Adults, and a healthcare nursing resource director and healthcare educator was completed. The results were then analyzed to determine if Los Rios Community College District modifications were made, would it result in increased medical assistant graduates. The research questions were mapped to the hypotheses/assumptions. There was a direct connection between the results and findings to the research problem.

The Medical Assistant Survey consisted of 24 structured questions answered by 50 medical assistants employed at Sutter Medical Foundation in Sacramento, California. A Survey Monkey Questionnaire was distributed by email and 50 respondents participated. There was a 7% participation rate of Sutter Medical Foundation’s 700 medical assistants. The intention of the survey was to assess participant background and demographics as a baseline. The survey was also designed to gain insight from currently employed medical assistants regarding medical assistant program selection, obtain feedback for prospective medical assistant students, and finally to assess interest in a program modeled after The Placer School for Adults, if the program had been available when the medical assistants were entering training.

The first category of 6 survey questions focused on baseline demographic information: gender, ethnicity, educational level prior entering training, current age, years of medical assistant experience, work experience prior to entering training. The most pertinent findings were 86% of respondents were female and 69% of respondents worked in another field prior to becoming a medical assistant (e.g. carpenter, waitress, bank teller, customer service representative, lab tech, and firefighter). Based upon

the survey results, the medical assistant field is not a first choice among high school graduates, but appeals to those looking for advancement after working in another field. The results lead this researcher to conclude the average medical assistant student would be older, potentially with a family to support and greater responsibility requiring significant commitment to enroll in school to pursue advancement.

86% were female

69% entered medical assistant training after working in another field first.

64% were Caucasian, 14% Asian or Pacific Islander

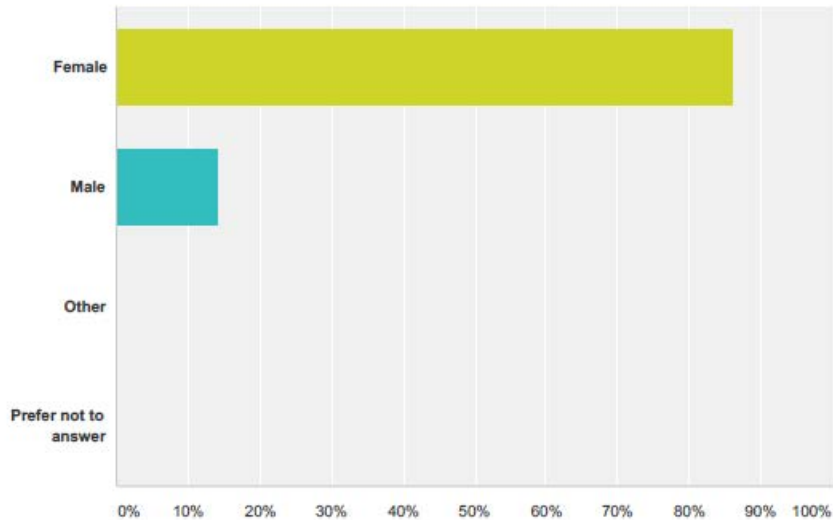
84% had some college, 36% AA or Bachelor's Degree: 16% high school or GED

95.92% were between 25-64 years of age.

61.22% had 6+ years of medical assistant experience

Q1 What is your gender?

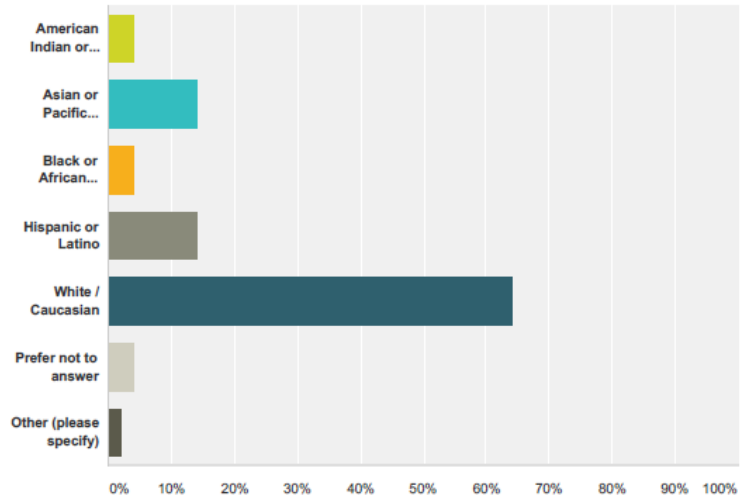
Answered: 50 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Female	86.00%	43
Male	14.00%	7
Other	0.00%	0
Prefer not to answer	0.00%	0
Total		50

Q2 What is your ethnicity? (Please select all that apply.)

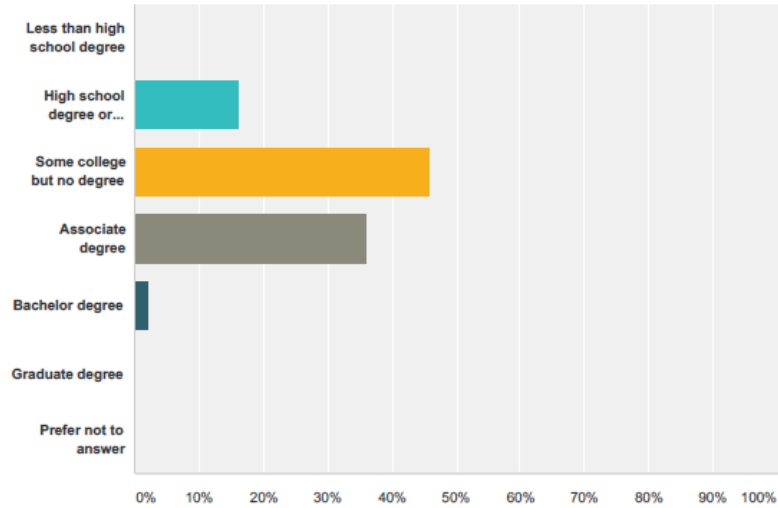
Answered: 50 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
American Indian or Alaskan Native	4.00%	2
Asian or Pacific Islander	14.00%	7
Black or African American	4.00%	2
Hispanic or Latino	14.00%	7
White / Caucasian	64.00%	32
Prefer not to answer	4.00%	2
Other (please specify)	2.00%	1
Total Respondents: 50		

Q3 What is the highest level of school you completed prior to medical assistant training?

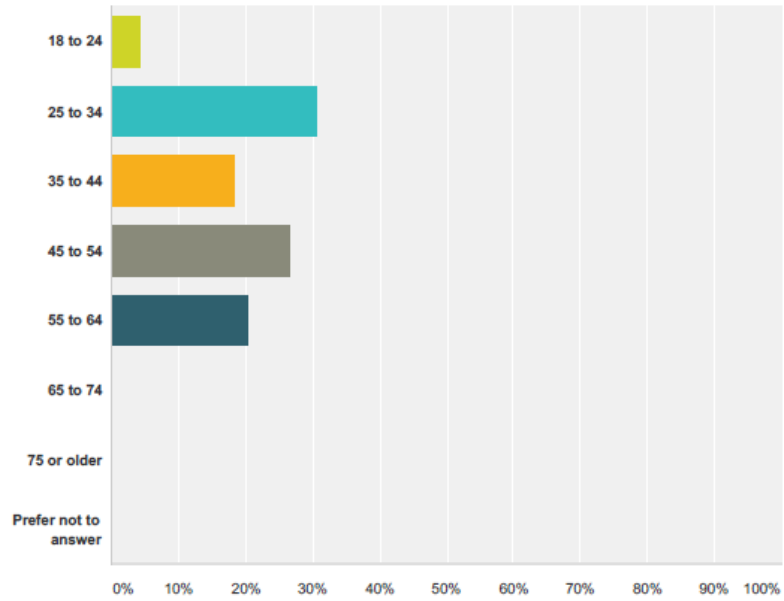
Answered: 50 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Less than high school degree	0.00%	0
High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)	16.00%	8
Some college but no degree	46.00%	23
Associate degree	36.00%	18
Bachelor degree	2.00%	1
Graduate degree	0.00%	0
Prefer not to answer	0.00%	0
Total		50

Q4 What is your age?

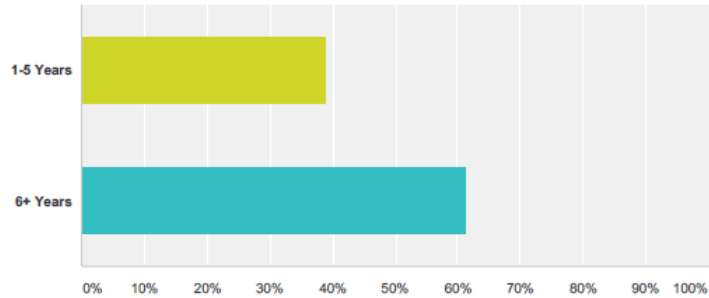
Answered: 49 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses	
18 to 24	4.08%	2
25 to 34	30.61%	15
35 to 44	18.37%	9
45 to 54	26.53%	13
55 to 64	20.41%	10
65 to 74	0.00%	0
75 or older	0.00%	0
Prefer not to answer	0.00%	0
Total		49

Q5 How long have you been a Medical Assistant and please comment on why you decided to enter field?

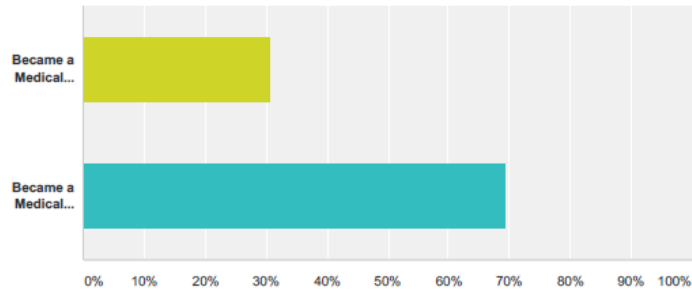
Answered: 49 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses	
1-5 Years	38.78%	19
6+ Years	61.22%	30
Total		49

Q6 Did you become a Medical Assistant right after High School or did you work in another field first?

Answered: 49 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses	
Became a Medical Assistant right after High School	30.61%	15
Became a Medical Assistant after working in other field	69.39%	34
Total		49

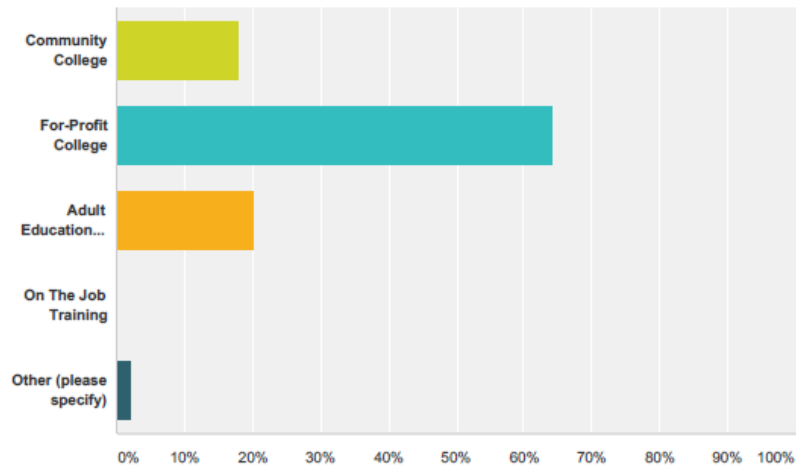
The second category of 7 survey questions focused on the type of medical assistant training completed; certification status; personal opinion of certification value; program length and schedule; employment status during training. The most pertinent findings in this area are that 64% of students

attended "For-Profit" programs, 20% Adult Educational/Vocational programs, and 18% Community College. Reason for program selection varied greatly but the top two reasons were short program length & convenient hours. 74.97% of program attended were between 9 months and 1+ years in length. 52% of programs were full time, and 66% of students worked full time or part time during training. 38% of respondents were certified, yet 63.6% either did not feel certification was important or were not sure of the importance of certification. The results lead this researcher to conclude "For-Profit" programs appeal to students significantly more than community college programs which is consistent with survey data indicating "For-Profit" schools have gained market share at the expense of community college programs. The importance of certification is emphasized by most institutions, but according to survey results the value of certification is not considered as important to medical assistants, and does not appear to affect employability.

64% attended for profit schools, 20% Voc. /Adult Education, 18% Community College
61.7% are not certified, 38.3% are certified.
36.73% believe certification is important, 63.6% believe it is not important or not sure
74.97% of programs were 9 months to 1+ year

Q7 What type of Medical Assistant program did you attend?

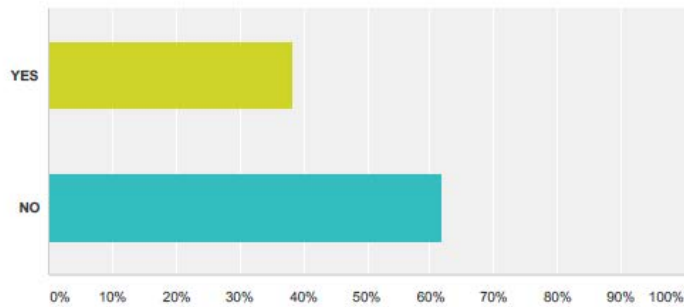
Answered: 50 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Community College	18.00% 9
For-Profit College	64.00% 32
Adult Education Program/Vocational	20.00% 10
On The Job Training	0.00% 0
Other (please specify)	2.00% 1
Total Respondents: 50	

Q9 Are you a Certified Medical Assistant?

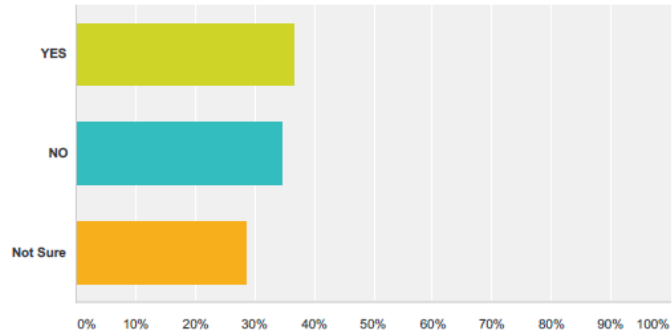
Answered: 47 Skipped: 3



Answer Choices	Responses
YES	38.30% 18
NO	61.70% 29
Total	47

Q10 In your opinion, is it important to be Certified as a Medical Assistant, if YES or NO, please comment why?

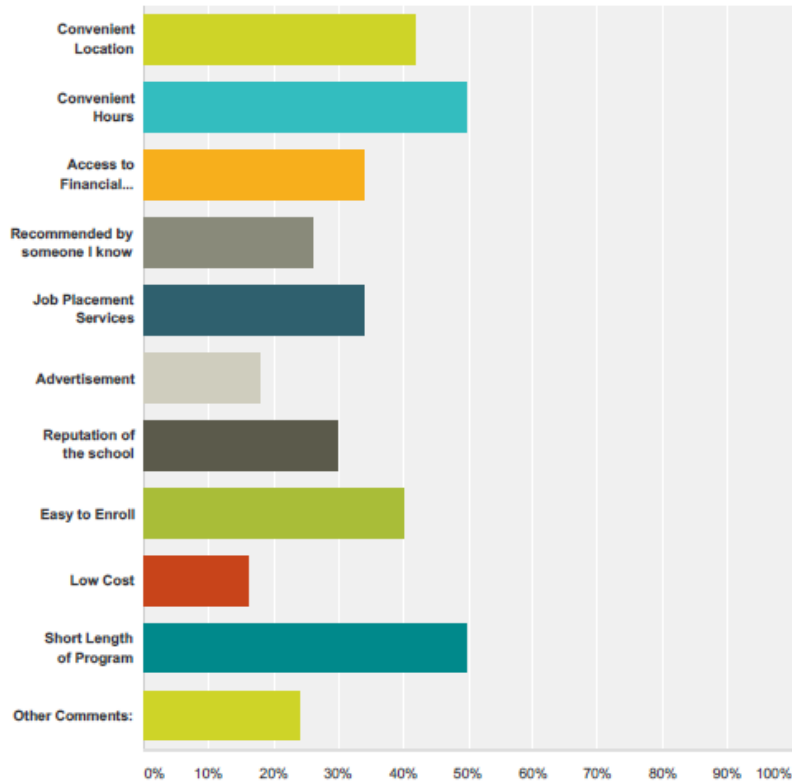
Answered: 49 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses	
YES	36.73%	18
NO	34.69%	17
Not Sure	28.57%	14
Total		49

**Q11 Why did you choose the Medical Assistant training program you attended?
(Check all that apply)**

Answered: 50 Skipped: 0

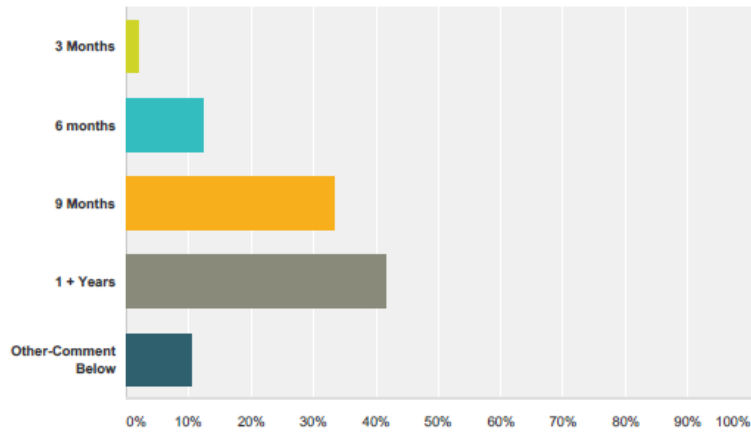


Answer Choices	Responses
Convenient Location	42.00% 21
Convenient Hours	50.00% 25
Access to Financial Aid/Student Loans	34.00% 17
Recommended by someone I know	26.00% 13
Job Placement Services	34.00% 17
Advertisement	18.00% 9
Reputation of the school	30.00% 15
Easy to Enroll	40.00% 20

Low Cost	16.00%	8
Short Length of Program	50.00%	25
Other Comments:	24.00%	12
Total Respondents: 50		

Q12 How long was your program?

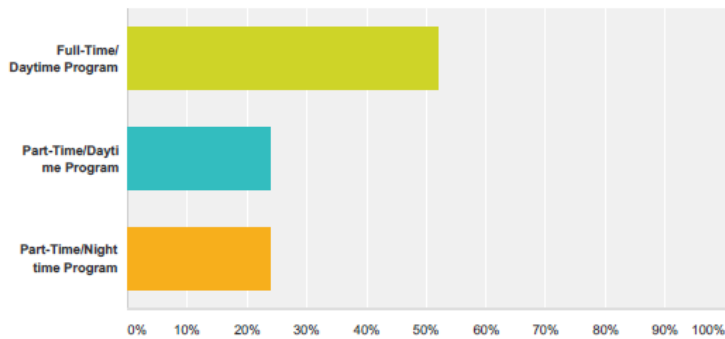
Answered: 48 Skipped: 2



Answer Choices	Responses	
3 Months	2.08%	1
6 months	12.50%	6
9 Months	33.33%	16
1 + Years	41.67%	20
Other-Comment Below	10.42%	5
Total		48

Q13 Was your program full-time or part-time?

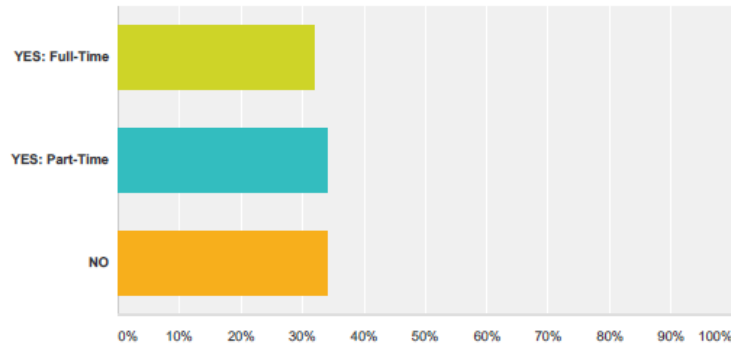
Answered: 50 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses	
Full-Time/ Daytime Program	52.00%	26
Part-Time/Daytime Program	24.00%	12
Part-Time/Nighttime Program	24.00%	12
Total		50

Q14 Did you work while attending the program?

Answered: 50 Skipped: 0



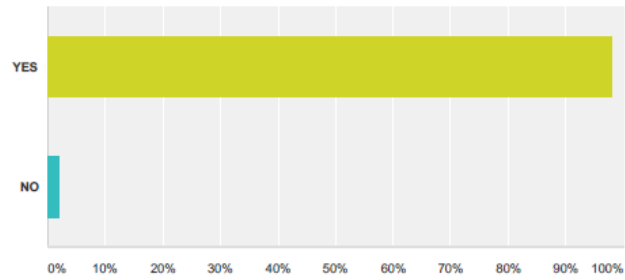
Answer Choices	Responses
YES: Full-Time	32.00% 16
YES: Part-Time	34.00% 17
NO	34.00% 17
Total	50

The third category of 3 survey questions focused on extern requirements; employment offers by extern facility; and time to full time employment post-graduation. 97.96% participated in a formal externship program, 56% were offered employment by their externship facility upon completion. 34% were employed within one week of graduation, with 16% taking one year to find full time employment. The results lead this researcher to conclude almost all medical assistants participate in an externship which can directly lead to an offer of employment. Students are highly employable after externship and the majority is employed within one week of graduation. Medical assistant training and externship is a direct avenue to gainful employment.

- 97.96% programs offer externships
- 56.6% of students receive offers of employment by externship facility
- 34% of graduates are employed within one week of graduation

Q15 Did your program have an externship requirement?

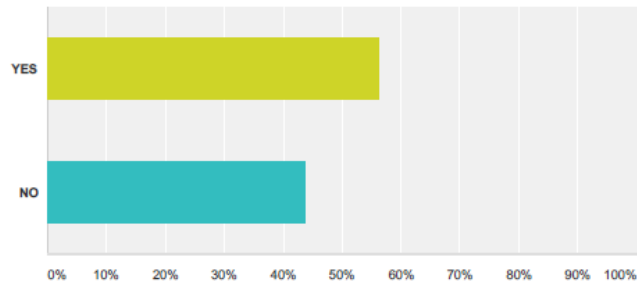
Answered: 49 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses
YES	97.96% 48
NO	2.04% 1
Total	49

Q16 If you completed an externship, were you offered a full-time paid position with the company/institution upon completion?

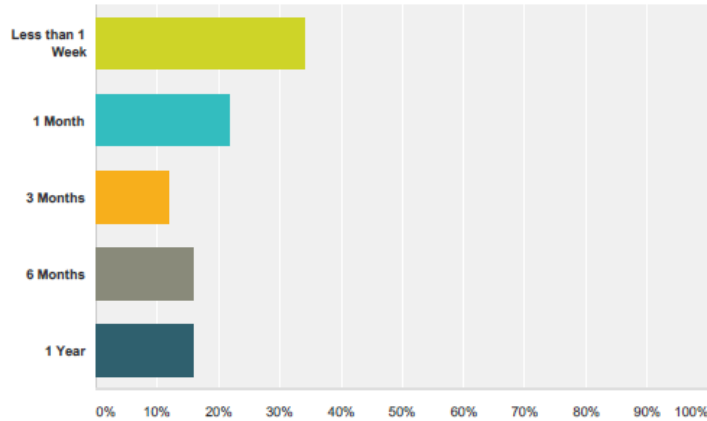
Answered: 48 Skipped: 2



Answer Choices	Responses
YES	56.25% 27
NO	43.75% 21
Total	48

Q17 After graduation, how long did it take you to find a full-time paid position as a Medical Assistant?

Answered: 50 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Less than 1 Week	34.00% 17
1 Month	22.00% 11
3 Months	12.00% 6
6 Months	16.00% 8
1 Year	16.00% 8
Total	50

The fourth category of 7 survey questions focused on cost; quality; financing; program reviews; assessment of The Placer School for Adults Program; and honest dialogue and advice for prospective medical assistant students. According to survey results, program cost ranged from free to \$48,000. 42.85% paid between \$10,001 and \$48,000. 60% felt their program was properly priced and worth it, and 40% felt the opposite. 88% respondents paid with loans or family help and 32% received financial aid or attended for free. 40% have paid off their debt, 54.29% are still paying, and 5.71% have defaulted on their loans. 67.3% of students would recommend the program attended and 32.61% would not. 77.5% of respondents would have preferred attending a program modeled after The Placer School for Adults, 10.2% responded maybe, and 12.2% said no, mainly focusing on concern for quality and that a shorter program would not be as comprehensive or thorough resulting in a less well rounded graduate. Others commenting that the length of a longer program allowed the students enough time to absorb complex information and be better prepared for the workforce.

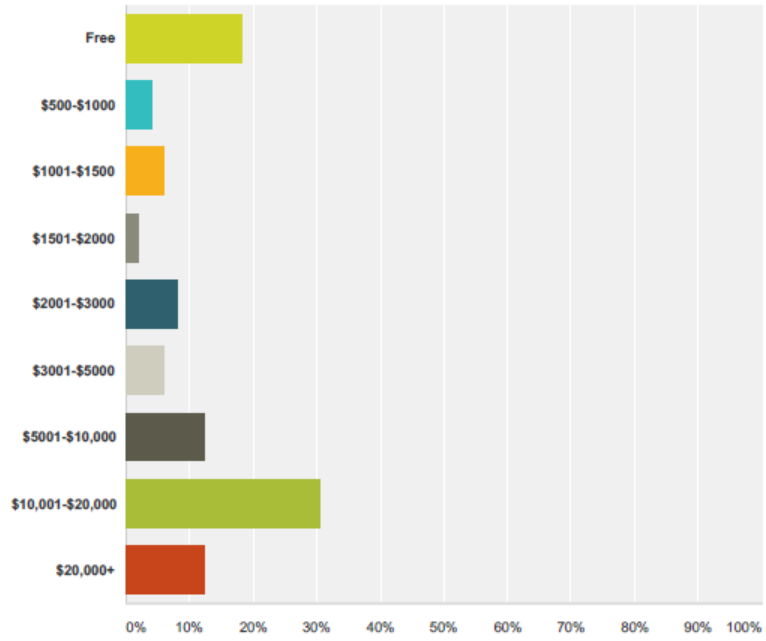
Based upon comments many medical assistants believe they paid more than they should have, and should have put more thought into their decision to select a better quality or less expensive program. Some commented price of program was excessive considering medical assistant earning capacity. Some felt their program was inferior. Some felt a much shorter program would have prepared them for employment at a much lower cost with no difference in employability. Other's felt the program they attended was the best for them and met their needs.

The results lead this researcher to conclude that each student is an individual and has different priorities. Although the majority of students paid tuition between \$10,001 and \$48,000, 60% of students felt their program was reasonable and appropriate. This finding was not anticipated as most students incurred long term debt that took more than 6 years to pay off. Some students believe they do not earn enough in comparison with beauticians and wait staff. Most students when offered an alternative would consider The Placer School for Adults, and few would have concern regarding the quality of the education.

42.85 % paid between \$10,001 and \$48,000
60% felt their program was properly priced and worth it
88% paid with loans or family help
32% received financial aid or attended for free.
54.29% are still paying off debt
67.3% of students would recommend the program attended and 32.61% would not.
77.5% would have preferred to attend a program modeled after Placer School for Adults

Q18 How much was your tuition(excluding books and misc fees)?

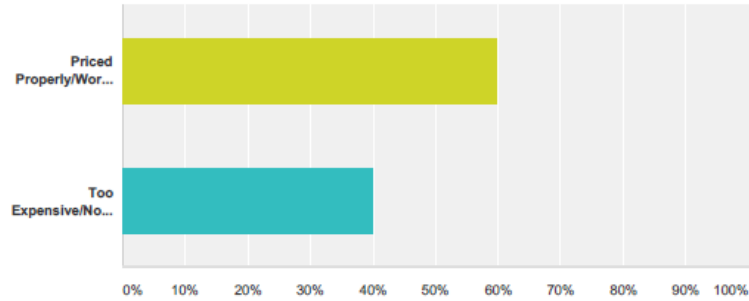
Answered: 49 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses	
Free	18.37%	9
\$500-\$1000	4.08%	2
\$1001-\$1500	6.12%	3
\$1501-\$2000	2.04%	1
\$2001-\$3000	8.16%	4
\$3001-\$5000	6.12%	3
\$5001-\$10,000	12.24%	6
\$10,001-\$20,000	30.61%	15
\$20,000+	12.24%	6
Total		49

Q19 In retrospect, was your program reasonably priced for the quality and ability to prepare you to work as a Medical Assistant?

Answered: 50 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Priced Properly/Worth it!	60.00% 30
Too Expensive/Not Worth it - please insert comment	40.00% 20
Total	50

20 comments were received- See Appendix D-1 for detailed Comments

A few of the most important comments were:

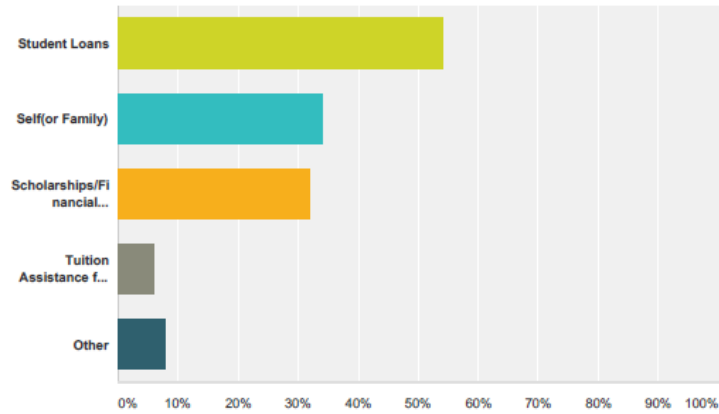
-You can attend less expensive schools to become a MA and get Ur certificate and still get a good job with any experience.

-The program I entered into was costly although I believe the education experience was well worth it. I do wish I had researched out other options as I have heard there are less expensive ways/programs available. I regret that I have a large student loan that I am unable to pay off.

-It was high price considering what a MA makes in a year.

Q20 How did you pay for your training program? (check all that apply)

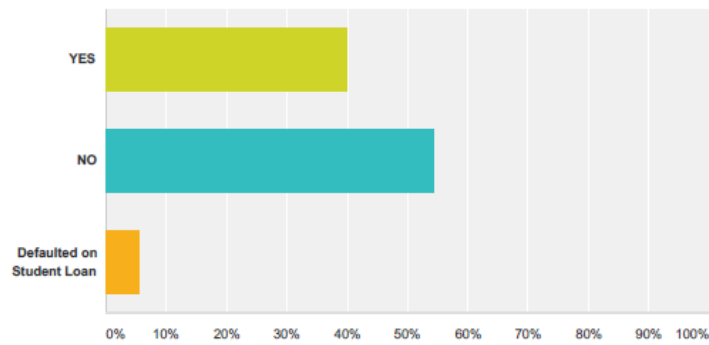
Answered: 50 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Student Loans	54.00% 27
Self(or Family)	34.00% 17
Scholarships/Financial Aid(Free)	32.00% 16
Tuition Assistance from Employer	6.00% 3
Other	8.00% 4
Total Respondents: 50	

Q21 If you had student loans/debt, have you paid off the debt?

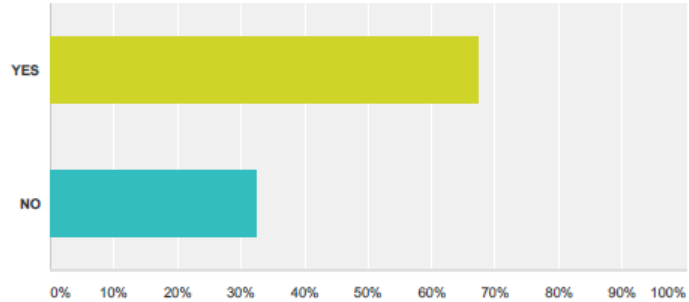
Answered: 35 Skipped: 15



Answer Choices	Responses
YES	40.00% 14
NO	54.29% 19
Defaulted on Student Loan	5.71% 2
Total	35

Q22 Would you recommend the Medical Assistant training program you attended to others? Please insert comment.

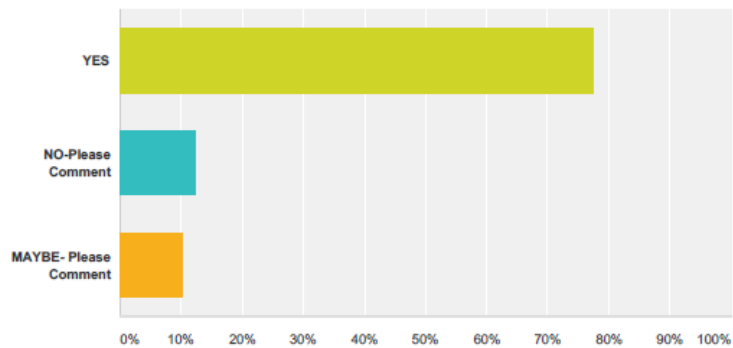
Answered: 46 Skipped: 4



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
YES	67.39%	31
NO	32.61%	15
Total		46

Q23 If a night-time 18 week program(two nights per week and 6 Saturday classes-cost \$1500) was an option when you attended training, would you have considered this program & schedule?

Answered: 49 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
YES	77.55%	38
NO-Please Comment	12.24%	6
MAYBE- Please Comment	10.20%	5
Total Respondents: 49		

20 comments were received- See Appendix D-2 for detailed Comments

A few of the most important comments were:

-This would have been a quicker course and the cost of it is awesome. I could pay this back in a few months verse years.

I would not feel I would get as good of an education for \$1500.00.

-But would you be giving the quality of education of a 9month to 1 year course?

**Q24 What advice would you provide
prospective Medical Assistants considering
entering the field?**

Answered: 45 Skipped: 5

Survey respondents were offered an opportunity to provide advice to prospective medical assistants. There were a few trends identified: Go for it if you love patients! Fulfilling! Takes commitment and hard work. Good way to get your foot in the door to a healthcare career. Don't do it for the money. Consider becoming an RN or LVN instead. Externships are important- work hard and you will be offered a permanent position. Try to work for a large employer. Evaluate all programs and watch out for debt!

20 comments were received- See Appendix D-3 for detailed Comments

A few of the most important comments were:

-If you Love helping people, this is for you but remember helping people isn't always list on your job description it what comes out of your heart to do for someone else.

-Make sure this is something you really would enjoy. There is a lot of commitment involved in this field form the school work to the job. You have someone else's life in your hand so make sure this is something you want to do.

The results lead this researcher to conclude that each student entered the field for a different reason. Trends identified indicate prospective students should take due care in evaluating medical assistant training programs to avoid excessive debt. Medical assistant work is hard and requires motivation, and that primary motivator needs to be love of patients, not economic rewards. Other trends indicate that being a medical assistant is a good way to enter the healthcare field, but prospective

students should not sell themselves short and should consider becoming an RN or LVN instead for greater economic rewards and responsibility.

Key Informant Interview- The Placer School for Adults

The Placer School for Adults key informant interview included first attending a mandatory prospective medical assistant orientation facilitated by school Principal Bettencourt and the medical assistant instructor. 25 prospective students attended, most were working adults looking for a career change, or reentering the workforce. There was one recent high school graduate. Common themes during Q&A focused on demand for medical assistants, cost and intensity of program, graduation rates, unpaid externship requirement, ability to find an externship, attendance policy, and ability to find employment after graduation.

The interview consisted of 13 open ended questions. The intention was to assess program design and identify key factors contributing to the success of the program. The interview was also designed to gain insight into student attitudes regarding the program, student profile, enrollment, retention, graduation, and job placement statistics and accreditation.

Principal Bettencourt provided an overview of the program describing it as based on “quality, excellence and is rigor”. He observes that students attending night time classes are “more serious and focused than students attending day time programs”. According to Bettencourt most students are working during the day and attending the program at night and are focused on “getting a skill and getting a job”. The program graduates between 40-42 students per year, two sessions are held yearly, each with 20/21 students and a small wait list of 1 or 2 students. As Bettencourt stated, they have a 95+% graduation rate and an 85/95% placement rate after graduation.

The program is accredited by WASC (a generic accreditation, not specific to Medical Assistant Training Programs). Program cost is \$1195 including books. Additional costs include scrubs, CPR certification, stethoscope, registration for optional national certification test. Tuition must be paid upfront in full and there is no financial aid. If a student begins class and drops there are no refunds. There is no formal interview for admission to the program, students must attend a mandatory orientation session,

have a GED or High School Diploma, Social Security number, clear criminal background, fingerprints on record, a clear TB test, drug screening, up to date immunizations. Program is 18 weeks 2 nights a week 6 to 9:30 PM and adds Saturdays 1/2 days on the last 6 Saturdays. Followed by 160 or 40 hours per week of unpaid externship. Program is focused on medical assistant skills and does not include miscellaneous computer/front office skills or other pre-requisites other programs require.

Program includes all basic medical assisting duties including EKGs needle sticks injections and students practice on each other. Students must wear scrubs to class and a required to be punctual. Students are tested each week on curriculum. Upon completion of class it is recommended students take an optional NHCA certification tests. 2 hrs. / 50 minutes which is proctored on site. There is a 100% pass rate for students who take the test (some students must take it again to pass). Placer is not accredited with CAAHED or ABAHES, and students are not eligible to take the national CMA certification exam through AMA. Only students from an accredited program are eligible to take the CMA AMA test. Students who graduate from The Placer School for Adults take a national test which also accepts students who received OJT with no formal classroom experience. Graduates receive a certificate of completion from The Placer School for Adults. No credits are issued and nothing is transferrable to Community College.

According to Bettencourt the idea behind externship is to “get in, get started, and get ahead”. Externship’s are not required but are recommended. Externship placement is not guaranteed and is based on teacher recommendation from student performance: must be excellent, dedicated, and professional, demonstrate work ethic. Most students are placed in externships. Some hospitals require externships in order to hire. Some students are hired right out of their externship. Some students are concerned about working for free for 1 month or finding the perfect job. Bettencourt recommends students take a job to gain experience. If a student is offered a job without an externship that is fine. Experience on the job will suffice. Bettencourt stressed that externships are designed for students to gain hands-on skill, and not to be file clerks etc. Any student that is not satisfied with their externship should report the discrepancy and another placement will be attempted. Students may find their own externship, but the school must work directly with the employer to generate a “Memorandum of

Understanding” which must be approved by the Placer Board after review of the employer. All externships require written agreement, documenting required subjects were covered.

Bettencourt indicates the program is successful because it is focused on the technical skill necessary to obtain a job. Not loaded with “other stuff.” He does not believe they can increase graduation rates, as life happens and an isolated student may drop out. The program motto is “Quick/Affordable/Quality Education for Working Adults”. Bettencourt would like to add more teachers to run simultaneous sessions and integrate a phlebotomy class. The main challenge in offering this program is lack of additional teaching resources. There are no immediate plans to expand, but Bettencourt believes Placer could fill other sessions if they were added. Bettencourt indicates students have told him they choose program over other programs due to cost, convenience, quick program and ability to work during day and go to school at night. Bettencourt does not consider Community College programs competitors as they serve a different niche with more extensive subjects. Program is advertised through limited mailed catalog, billboard, Facebook, Auburn Journal (once a week advertisement rotating class focus). The program partners with Sutter, Kaiser and Weimar Family Care to place externs. Funding is provided by 50% State and 50% tuition. Bettencourt tries to keep tuition as low as possible so students can afford to attend. Tuition is set to cover cost of instruction, supplies.

The results lead this researcher to conclude The Placer School for Adults, offers an expedited program that appeals to students who have worked in other fields, who want to continue working while attending a compact program that will provide a direct path to new employment, without the structure or length of a Community College program.

Key Informant Interview- Los Rios Community College District

The interview consisted of 11 open ended questions. The intention was to assess program design and identify key factors contributing to the success of the program. The interview was also designed to gain insight into program design, student profile, enrollment, retention, graduation, and job placement statistics and accreditation.

Two key informants were interviewed: Kimberly Harrell, Dean Health & Technology and Cori Burns- Faculty & MA Program Coordinator. My phone interview with Dean Harrell was initially met with some resistance regarding data sharing. After discussion Dean Harrell agreed to proceed with the interview. Dean Harrell recommended that I contact Cori Burns to receive more specific information regarding program design and student profile.

Dear Harrell is aware of the increased demand for the need for medical assistants. On the Los Rios Community College web site, the ED Gainful Employment Disclosure template reports the program graduates less than 50 medical assistant students per year. Program cost: Tuition and Fees: \$1,104 and books and supplies at \$1,746 for a total of: \$2,850. Financing options include grants, scholarships, and loans, on their web site the required posting. 26 students graduate per year in cohort groupings, taking 1.5 years, 3 semesters followed by 180 hour externship. Admission is based upon application based lottery system. To be eligible students must complete pre-requisites. They do not maintain a waiting list. They have approximately 60 applicants for 26 slots. Pre-requisites include intro to medical terminology, anatomy and physiology, computer & English.

According to Cori Burns, when students begin classes with pre-requisites out of the way, less time is spent on teaching basics and greater focus can be spent on key skills. They have a very low dropout rate- generally 26 students graduate. Those that do drop out, usually due to family issues, return and complete the program. Los Rios Community College offers a certificate program with graduates receiving a certificate of proficiency and a degree program. They do not have any formal outreach to attract students, no formal advertisements, other than the school catalog and word of mouth.

Both Harrell and Burns, would like to expand the program but are limited by not enough externship positions. Los Rios Community College is actively working with community employers and other stakeholders participating in Health Career Pathways a Whitehouse sponsored program to look for ways to increase enrollment and opportunities for students in health career fields that are in demand. They both cited a lack of externships opportunities as a roadblock to increasing enrollment. They believe the program can expand if more externships are added. Students from Los Rios Community College who are placed in externships must be mentored by a certified medical assistant, which may limit the ability to

place students. According Burns, Los Rios Community College has been approached by Sutter to double their output, but they are unable to do this until externships are available to meet need of graduating student. They both comment that there is not enough opportunity to place students. Many graduates do not obtain jobs for 6 months after graduation which is frustrating.

Los Rios Community College is accredited with CAAHED and ABAHES, and students are eligible to take national CMA certification exam through AMA. Only students from an accredited program are eligible to take the CMA AMA test. Students are required to go to a testing center, cost is \$125. Students who graduate from other programs such as Placer take a national test which also accepts students who received OJT with no formal classroom experience.

When asked if they could add a night time program modeled after The Placer School for Adults both Harrell and Burns indicate they are constrained in the type of programs offered as they do believe that pre-requisites in medical terminology, A & P, intro to medical assisting, computer and English make a well-rounded student. During the program not as much time is spent teaching the basics and they focus medical assisting clinical subject. Program previously did not have pre-requisites, but these were added 4 years ago, due to feedback re quality of graduates and alignment with partner hospitals. According to Burns "more prepared graduates and better quality graduates are what the medical community wants." They are not looking at modifying the program but rather additional partnership opportunities with community providers to expand externship opportunities and then the program could expand. Los Rios Community College partners primarily with Sutter, some Marshall Hospital, and is just beginning to place students at Dignity Health System.

According to Burns, there is a disconnection between what employers say they want and the candidates they actually hire. Sutter says they want certified medical assistants, but when students are in externships, they can be hired without certification which is a discrepancy between requirements. Dignity is the only local facility that pays a differential if a candidate is certified.

They are looking for industry partners to allow them to grow.

The results lead this researcher to conclude Los Rios Community College's goal is to graduate a well-rounded, well prepared student that will excel as a medical assistant. The design of the comprehensive Los Rios Community College Medical Assistant Curriculum is directly a result of feedback from employers to produce high level graduates. The college is not currently motivated or evaluating modification to their program to expedite graduation as they have difficulty placing the students they graduate at this time. There is a degree of frustration that employers covet the quality of the Consumes College graduate, yet employers (especially large health care systems) provide precious externship positions to students graduating from less comprehensive programs and overall are not providing enough or timely externship opportunities for their graduates. The conflict between what employers say they want, and the students they offer employment to, appear to be in conflict.

Key Informant Interview- Healthcare Nursing Resource Director & Healthcare Educator:

The interview consisted of 7 open ended questions. The intention was to assess the perspective of a large healthcare provider and consumer of medical assistant resources, and understand the challenges faced by organizations which are dependent upon a consistent stream of new medical assistants in order to meet the growing need for these essential healthcare team members in their organization. The interview was designed to gain insight into recruiting efforts, quality and impressions of the different training programs, quality of students, plans to address the increased need and other challenges facing the industry.

Two key informants were interviewed by phone separately, Christine Cress, RN- Sutter Health System Office- Director, Nurse Workforce & Leadership Development and Tarina Levitt-Trujillo RN, Clinical Educator, Sutter Medical Foundation.

Christine Cress is the Director of Nurse Workforce & Leadership Development for the Sutter Health System Office. She is currently leading an initiative to assess how the organization will address the medical assistant and nursing shortage and retention plans. Cress provided a variety of visual aids which have been incorporated into this narrative. According to Cress, Sutter Health is experiencing a shortage of qualified medical assistants and registered nurses which is anticipated to get significantly

worse in the next 3 – 5 yrs. The organization understands that if nothing is done to address this issue, patient care could be impacted.

One avenue to increase interest in healthcare careers is using the High School Pathway, to expose students to opportunities within healthcare with a focus on having a “pipeline of future leaders to develop within the organization.” According to Cress we need “people in the door, and we need to keep them through compensation development and a career ladder.”

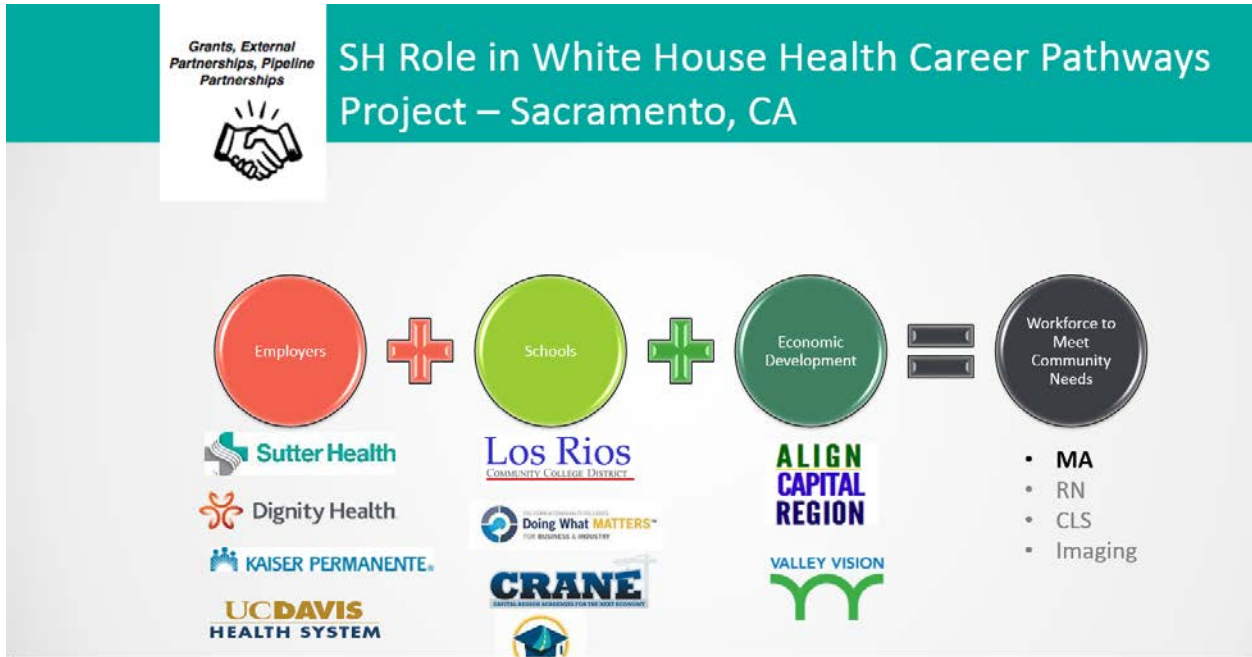


According to Cress, Sutter Health is participating in Health Career Pathways a Whitehouse sponsored program. Sacramento is one of seven pilot regions committed to working collaboratively with healthcare providers, local workforce, community colleges including Los Rios Community College and community based organizations to “develop and validate competency models and career pathways so that individuals can earn family-sustaining wages”. With the key focus on:

- Increased career advancement for individuals in the healthcare industry
- A more skilled, qualified workforce that meets the needs of employers
- More efficient and transparent hiring processes adopted by employers

- Improved quality of care provided at healthcare institutions

(Hope Street Group, 2016-2017)



Sutter Health is aware of the anticipated growth for medical assistants, and Cress shared the graph below demonstrating that from 2012-2016 the Sutter Health System has seen a 40% growth in medical assistants within the organization.

Year End Headcount						
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	% Growth over period
SMF	561	577	609	645	704	25%
SGMF	283	310	318	333	330	17%
SEBMF	120	132	151	172	183	53%
SPMF	171	185	182	205	246	44%
PAMF	821	935	1019	1143	1282	56%
System	2050	2235	2381	2612	2864	40%

To ensure Sutter is well positioned to meet the growing need for medical assistants, the organization is undertaking a comprehensive assessment to identify variabilities in:

- Approach to recruitment, selection, on-boarding and retention
- Effectiveness of partnership with local colleges/community
- Effectiveness in residency and preceptor programs

With answers to the above questions, a baseline can be set, and individual areas within the organization can assess best practices and a more comprehensive and unified approach to on-boarding and retaining medical assistants. There is no guarantee alignment will occur as each foundation may have different budgets or priorities. Per Cress, Sutter is not focused on quantity, the organization as a whole wants to ensure the proper medical assistants are selected, are well trained, compassionate, committed to high level patient care, are a good fit with the organization, and are competent to perform their duties. Cress also indicates Sutter in turn, needs to ensure they retain these important resources. There is much competition within the health care community and retention and job satisfaction is key.

Cress shared a variety of data points identifying areas of concern. Not only is there an increased demand for medical assistants within the organization, there is also an unacceptably high turnover rate, especially within the first 2 years of employment. Various factors are involved, including personal reasons, better opportunity or transfers, with very few involuntary terminations. The organization is

focusing on ways to increase job satisfaction and growth. Sutter is also anticipating attrition due to retirement which will also increase demand.

According to Cress, position fill time drives up costs. System wide on average it takes 48.8 days to on board a new hire from date of posting. During that period of time the facility must backfill with more expensive agency staff which drive up costs; or run short staffed, which has a downstream negative effect on providers and patients. Sutter Health does not have an adequate supply of medical assistant candidates to meet demand. See graph below- top schools 10 schools recruited from, 5 of which are now out of business. 1/3 of MA's were recruited from schools in the "all others" category.

Education of 2016 SMF Hires		
	Count	%
Cambridge Junior College*	33	11%
Heald College**	27	9%
MTI College	24	8%
Carrington College*	22	8%
Cosumnes River College	19	7%
Charles A. Jones Career and Education Center	15	5%
Anthem College	14	5%
Brightwood College*	11	4%
National Career Education	9	3%
Boston Reed College*	8	3%
all others	110	38%
Total	292	100%

Over 60% of SMFs MA hires came from the 10 listed schools
5 of the 10 institutions were top providers for system wide MA hires

Schools with the Best Retention

Top 10 listed schools re: quantity of hires
* Indicates also in the top 10 for MA hires system wide
** Out of business

According to Tarina Levitt-Trujillo, Clinical Educator, RN- Sutter Medical Foundation, junior colleges appear to provide the best and most knowledgeable students who are able to pass the pre-hire examination and are most prepared for their role. Students from other programs can be "hit or miss" and can't always pass the pre-employment exam. There is a sense of quality variation in new grads. Sutter Medical Foundation does not receive enough qualified candidates for open clinical positions. Medical assistants are not prepared for the work environment because there is a wide variation on how medical assistant schools are preparing students. Not all Sutter affiliates require medical assistants to be certified, which may contribute to quality differences.

There is an impression that the quality of school output can be driven by employer demands- and that Sutter is not harnessing the power of the size of their system. There is also a sense that the community college is not graduating enough students, at a quick enough pace, and that modifications could surely be made. Both Trujillo and Cress understand the need to provide externships to new grads, but there is not always alignment within the organization to provide a robust experience and with hands-on in all aspects of medical assistant responsibilities. It takes commitment by the organization and individual office to accept an extern. Externs cannot be delegated to file clerk duties when the intention of an externship is “hands-on” real experience of working alongside a highly trained and competent medical assistant mentor. Not all departments are prepared to provide that experience and proper placement is key for the students to obtain the most benefit from their externship experience.

Some affiliates utilize a pre-employment screening tool “Talent Plus” the software will recommend or not recommend a candidate. Affiliates have found that those who were hired that were not recommended by the software program were less likely to be successful in their role. Unfortunately this software is not available at all affiliates due to cost.

Cress provided examples of the variety of medical assistant programs provided at Sutter which demonstrates a lack of alignment between the various foundations. Some have developed robust onboarding processes for medical assistants.

Example #1: MAPP Program (Medical Assistant Preparatory Program). Screens and interviews 100 candidates and 20 attend an unpaid 4 week program focused on “job readiness skills” and medical assistant competency standards & foundation patient care and conduct standards. At completion with testing and further screening, candidates are hired as limited term employees in a float pool and partnered with a preceptor for 3 months. After 6 months the medical assistant may apply for other placements within the organization. The program also develops experienced and high performing medical assistants as preceptors which are paid a differential to provide this role. There is a 94% retention rate for students who have completed program that were hired.

Example #2: Uses Talent plus Pre-Screening, and only hires medical assistants certified through the AMA. They partner new grads with a mentor and have reported no issues with quality.

Example 3#: Screens and interviews certified medical assistants into a 4 week paid Medical Assistant Residency Program (MARP). Designed for new grads and experienced medical assistants who want to work for the foundation. There is no guarantee of continued employment. If the employee is not hired into a permanent position within 45 days or program completion, employment is terminated.

Example #4: Prospective employees must take a prescreen skills tests. Lacks standard mentor process in the care centers, need for mentors are not prioritized by some within the organization, and the effort to mentor is not consistent across the organization. The foundation is modifying onboarding program to provide more focus on clinic and mentoring in order to validate medical assistant clinical skills and ensure that newly hired medical assistants are not overloaded with so much information during their two week orientation process that they cannot retain the information.

Based upon this interview there is clear concern about the ability to hire and retain the high quality staff needed and there is great variability in the approach to recruitment, selection, on-boarding and retention of medical assistant staff. There is variability in effectiveness and lack of partnerships with local colleges and community programs.

The results lead this researcher to conclude that Sutter Health a large healthcare provider with many foundations spread over a large geographic area in Northern California. The system is not aligned in approach to recruit and retain medical assistants. Sutter Health is acutely aware of the need to provide an appropriate avenue to provide externship opportunities to appropriate candidates and onboard high quality medical assistants. A focused initiative is in process to assess and improve onboarding and retention.

Results and Findings Summary

In summary, the underlying hypothesis of this research project was to meet the increased need for medical assistants, community college programs should be modeled after The Placer School for Adults medical assistant training program to: (1) increase enrollment; (2) provide students with an expedited, affordable course of instruction. The main research question explored in this study was: If Los Rios Community College District offered a medical assistant training program modeled after Placer School for

Adult's affordable and effective alternative, including expedited night and daytime classes, would more students enroll, graduate with less debt and be able to fill the projected need for these healthcare extenders.

Detailed analysis of research findings based upon all segments of inquiry: medical assistants, and key informants at Los Rios Community College District; The Placer School for Adults; and Sutter Health indicate there are significant areas of alignment but there are also significant areas of discord. The medical assistant survey results indicate 77.5% of currently employed medical assistants at Sutter Medical Foundation in Sacramento would have considered enrolling in an expedited program modeled after The Placer School for Adults. The Placer School for Adults, graduates approximately 40 students a year, which is more than Los Rios Community College. Placer also has a 95% placement rate which demonstrates their success in graduating employable students. However, their curriculum is focused on "getting a skill and getting a job" which is producing students who are finding jobs, yet these graduates have not received the comprehensive education provided by Los Rios Community College. According to the interview with key informants at Los Rios Community College their program is constrained, and they are not necessarily motivated to modify their program as it was designed based upon feedback from healthcare employers to ensure medical assistants are of the highest quality to pass required tests and perform at the highest level within the institution where they are employed. Secondly, there is little on the part of the Los Rios Community College to modify their program if the current graduates cannot be placed in timely externships. Based upon key informant interviews with Sutter Health, there is agreement that junior colleges appear to provide the best and most knowledgeable students who are able to pass the pre-hire examination and are most prepared for their role. Students from other programs can be "hit or miss" and can't always pass the pre-employment exam. Yet, Sutter Health does employ graduates from The Placer School of Adult Education, and other vocational programs who are successful in their role. There is also a sense that the Community College system is not graduating enough students, at a quick enough pace. Although Sutter indicates they do not receive enough qualified candidates for open clinical positions, they have contributed to the problem by not providing enough externship opportunities to graduates, which according to the medical assistant survey 56.6% of students received offers of employment by their externship facility. The main research question asked in this study was: By

modeling community college programs after the Placer College for Adult education, will more medical assistants enroll? Based upon survey results, interviews and analysis, the answer to the research question is YES. However, this research uncovered unexpected findings that there is little motivation for Los Rios Community College to modify their program, unless they receive greater support for their externs by large healthcare facilities who are consumers of their medical assistant graduates. Additionally, even if Los Rios Community College wished to modify their program, they would not want to do so at the expense of quality and depth of education, which is clearly being communicated as a priority by healthcare providers.

CHAPTER FIVE - CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

The hypothesis for this research study was : To meet the increased need for medical assistants, community college programs should be modeled after “The Placer School for Adults’ medical assistants training program” to: (1) increase enrollment; (2) provide students with an expedited, affordable course of instruction; and (3) meet the current and future demand for medical assistants. The main research question asked in this study was: By modeling community college programs after the Placer College for Adult education, will more medical assistants enroll? Interestingly, the questions and findings are complicated and do not necessary support at this time a modification of Los Rios Community College Program without other dependencies being addressed.

A summary of program features is listed in grid below:

A	B	C
Characteristic	Program-Los Rios Community College	Program-The Placer School for Adults
Program Name	Los Rios Community College	The Placer School For Adults
Motto	Comprehensive training-Well Rounded Graduates	Get in, get started, get ahead
Length	2 Semesters(1 year)	18 Weeks(2 Nights a week 6-9:30pm) & 1/2 Day on 6 Saturdays
PreRequisites	Yes- Med Terminology, Anatomy/Physiology,English	No
Cost	\$2850(including books) + prerequisites	\$1195(including Books)
Comprehensive Ciriculum	Yes	No-Focused on MA Duties Only
Externship Placement Offered	Yes	Yes
Certification Offered	AMA(Gold Standard)	Non AMA Certification
Preferred by Employers	Yes	Maybe
# of Graduates Annually	26	40-41
Graduation Rate	95%+	95%+

Conclusions:

(1) Research revealed that Sutter Health does not have sufficient qualified medical assistants to meet their need. Sutter Medical Foundation has concerns about the quality of candidates that graduate from vocational programs and believe that community college programs graduate more qualified candidates.

(2) Research revealed that The Placer School for Adults, graduates approximately 40 students yearly with 85-95% placement. Although a high placement rate, there may be some concern regarding the expedited program producing candidates that are not a comprehensively trained as community college graduates.

(3) Research revealed that Los Rios Community College graduates well qualified medical assistants, but with graduation rates of approximately 26 students a year, there is concern they do not graduate enough students to meet demand.

(4) Research revealed there is agreement by Sutter Medical Foundation, The Placer School for Adults and Los Rios Community College that more quality externship programs are needed. All agree that high quality medical assistants are necessary in order to appropriately care for our booming patient populations. Yet, there are huge variations in the type of training programs available, cost, length, and curriculum. It is clear from scholarly research, as well as surveys and key informant interviews, there is need for alignment to ensure these dependent entities work together with a collective vision to increase the number of quality medical assistants. The issue is not as simple as modifying programs, but also must result greater participation by healthcare providers to ensure program curriculum is relevant and additional externship slots are available. It is clear that vocational schools and community college programs cannot function in a bubble, and that large healthcare providers cannot rely on these programs knowing what they expect in a graduate. In addition, large healthcare providers must play their own role by offering enough rigorous structured externship opportunities in order to provide the “hands-on” experience in order to “cement the deal!” Until healthcare providers engage more fully in this process, there is little need for Los Rios Community College to increase the number of graduates and the pipeline of medical assistants will continue to be constrained.

Now is the time for alignment between medical assistant training programs and healthcare employers.

Recommendations:

1. Healthcare providers must implement structured mentoring programs and increase the number of externship slots available for new medical assistant graduates. A culture change is required within organizations to accept externs and ensure they receive the knowledge and hands-on experience necessary to pass competency tests and become gainfully employed. Without an increased commitment by healthcare providers, the pipeline of available medical assistants will continue to be constrained. Beginning 1 July 2017, the Sutter Medical Foundation Executive Team should develop (create a pilot) a structured mentoring program for implementation in the

Fall 2017 to increase the number of externship slots available for new medical assistant graduates. This structured mentoring program should require SMF organizations to accept externs and ensure they receive the knowledge and hands-on experience necessary to pass competency tests and become gainfully employed.

2. If there is indeed a certain degree of quality lacking in vocational training graduates, healthcare providers must work in collaboration and provide feedback to vocational programs to identify areas where modifications are necessary to increase the knowledge of graduates who will meet the quality measure. Vocational schools should actively seek out this guidance as well. This will ensure greater quality in the large pipeline of medical assistants from vocational schools.
3. Los Rios Community College, should evaluate if there is a way to modify their program without compromising quality in order to expedite graduation. If modifications can be made, and length of program can be decreased, the result should be a measurable increase in the number of high quality medical assistant graduates.

Given the trends in growth and the need for medical assistants today and in the future, it is essential there is alignment between the healthcare provider, vocational schools and community college programs. Ideally, this would be collaborative in nature, as although vocational schools are in a different niche than community college programs, there is enough demand for both types of programs to exist, and produce high quality medical assistants.

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APPENDIX A

Research Questions: Administrators- Los Rios

1. Are you aware of the anticipated 23% growth in the need for MA's?
 - a. Do you have adequate capacity to meet demand?
2. What is the number of students you graduate each year?
3. Can you tell me regarding the programs you offer currently?
4. Do you have any current outreach to attract students to your MA program?
5. What are your current enrollment numbers and do you look to grow the MA program?
6. Does Los Rios have any plans to increase enrollment in MA program?
7. Would there be barriers to adding a night time program modeled after Placer?
8. What is the process for adding or adding or modifying programs?
9. Do you partner with any community healthcare providers?

APPENDIX B

Research Questions: Administrators- Placer School for Adults

1. How do you explain the success of your program?
 - a. What are the key elements of your success?
 - b. What modifications would you like make to enhance your program?
 - c. What do you consider to be the main challenge in offering this program?
2. Are you aware of the anticipated 23% growth rate in the need of MA's?
 - a. Do you have plans to expand your program? If yes, how will you accomplish this, if not, why not?
3. Have you ever considered partnering in some way with a Community College?
4. Do you advertise your program? If so, how?
5. Do you have a wait list?
6. What is your screening process?
7. What are the barriers, if any, in recruiting students? What have students told you about why they chose your program vs. another program?
8. Do you consider Community College to be competitors or complimentary?
9. What is your graduation rate? Could it be higher if certain adjustments were made?
10. What is the success rate of your graduates in finding employment as ACMA? Have you been approached by any CCC Administrators regarding your program design?
11. Do you partner with any healthcare providers?
12. Where to you obtain most of your funding?

APPENDIX C

Research Questions: Health Care Human Resources Professional/Healthcare Educator

1. Are you aware of the anticipated 23% growth in the need for MA's?
 - a. Do you have adequate supply of candidates to meet demand?
 - b. If not, what are your plans to meet demand?
2. What are the barriers to recruitment?
3. Do you have an opinion on the quality of training programs based upon test results or job readiness?
4. How long does it take to hire a MA and get them on to the job?
5. Do you have any plans to expedite recruitment?
6. Do you partner with any of the local MA Training Programs?
 - a. If so, what type of partnership?
 - b. Do you consider this partnership a success?
7. What do you see as the greatest challenge in recruiting and retaining MA?

APPENDIX D- Medical Assistant Survey Monkey Questions

Medical Assistant Survey

Medical Assistant Survey

With passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010, more people have gained access to healthcare. As the baby boomer population ages, more people will require healthcare intervention. Experts believe demand will result in major increase in healthcare job openings. One critical category that is expected to be in high demand is the Medical Assistant MA's provide essential support as part of the healthcare team. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the need for MA's are anticipated to increase by 29+ percent over the next 10 years, which is much faster than the average for all occupations. In order to prepare for this demand, accessible, reliable and credible MA training programs are required. The goal of this research project is to determine whether Los Rios Community College Medical Assistant Training programs can be modified to offer expedited night and daytime classes, so that more students will enroll and graduate and fill the projected need for Medical Assistants in the future. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback will provide insight into your rationale for program selection and may be helpful in identifying motivators that are common to prospective students.

1. What is your gender?

Female
 Male
 Other
 Prefer not to answer

2. What is your ethnicity? (Please select all that apply.)

American Indian or Alaskan Native
 Asian or Pacific Islander
 Black or African American
 Hispanic or Latino
 White / Caucasian
 Prefer not to answer
 Other (please specify)

3. What is the highest level of school you completed prior to medical assistant training?

- Less than high school degree
- High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor degree
- Graduate degree
- Prefer not to answer

4. What is your age?

- 18 to 24
- 25 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 54
- 55 to 64
- 65 to 74
- 75 or older
- Prefer not to answer

5. How long have you been a Medical Assistant and please comment on why you decided to enter field?

Why did you choose to become a Medical Assistant?

6. Did you become a Medical Assistant right after High School or did you work in another field first?

If you worked in another field 1st, what was your job title?

7. What type of Medical Assistant program did you attend?

- Community College
- For-Profit College
- Adult Education Program/Vocational
- On the Job Training
- Other (please specify)

8. If you became a Medical Assistant through "On the Job Training- OJT" did you subsequently attend a formal program?

If YES, Please specify why

9. Are you a Certified Medical Assistant?

10. In your opinion, is it important to be Certified as a Medical Assistant, if YES or NO, please comment why?

If YES or NO, please comment why:

11. Why did you choose the Medical Assistant training program you attended? (Check all that apply)

- Convenient Location
- Convenient Hours
- Access to Financial Aid/Student Loans
- Recommended by someone I know
- Job Placement Services
- Advertisement
- Reputation of the school
- Easy to Enroll
- Low Cost
- Short Length of Program
- Other Comments:

12. How long was your program?

- 3 Months
- 6 months
- 9 Months
- 1 + Years
- Other-Comment

Below Other (please specify)

13. Was your program full-time or part-time?

14. Did you work while attending the program?

15. Did your program have an externship requirement?

16. If you completed an externship, were you offered a full-time paid position with the company/institution upon completion?

Comments:

17. After graduation, how long did it take you to find a full-time paid position as a Medical Assistant?

Less than 1

Week 1 Month

3 Months

6 Months

1 Year

18. How much was your tuition (excluding books and misc fees)?

Free

\$500-\$1000

\$1001-\$1500

\$1501-\$2000

\$2001-\$3000

\$3001-\$5000

\$5001-\$10,000

\$10,001-

\$20,000

\$20,000+

Please Specify Tuition Amount

19. In retrospect, was your program reasonably priced for the quality and ability to prepare you to work as a Medical Assistant?

Priced Properly (Worth it!)

Too Expensive/Not Worth it - please insert comment

Comments:

20. How did you pay for your training program? (check all that apply)

- Student Loans
- Self(or Family)
- Scholarships/Financial Aid(Free)
- Tuition Assistance from Employer
- Other

Other (please specify)

21. If you had student loans/debt, have you paid off the debt?

Other (please specify)

22. Would you recommend the Medical Assistant training program you attended to others? Please insert comment.

Comment:

23. If a night-time 18 week program(two nights per week and 6 Saturday classes- cost \$1500) was an option when you attended training, would you have considered this program & schedule?

- YES
- NO-Please Comment
- MAYBE- Please Comment

Comment:

24. What advice would you provide prospective Medical Assistants considering entering the field?

Appendix D-1 Comments for Question 19:

Question: In retrospect, was your program reasonably priced for the quality and ability to prepare you to work as a Medical Assistant?

-AA degree portion was outrageous

-Not a lot of help finding a job and when you have problems with instructors they are swept under the rug.

-You can attend less expensive schools to become a MA and get Ur certificate and still get a good job with any experience

-Didn't accept my CSU credits

-The program at ARC was not available when I went to school. I wish it would have been.

-The program I entered into was costly although I believe the education experience was well worth it. I do wish I had researched out other options as I have heard there are less expensive ways/programs available. I regret that I have a large student loan that I am unable to pay off.

-It was high price considering what a MA makes in a year.

-As someone who went to school and paid this cost, the rate of pay is almost better as a waiter at a decent restaurant. My daughter makes more than me as a beautician.

-I felt that I could have received the same quality at another school, limited resources for education.

-I had no other program to compare it to.

-I ended up with a great job, but was under the impression it was going to cost me much less than it actually did.

-I had an awesome teacher. She was mature and an RN.

-I know a lot of people who attended the same college/program that I did, and the amount of

Appendix D-2 Comments for Question 23:

Question: If a night-time 18 week program (two nights per week and 6 Saturday classes- cost \$1500) was an option when you attended training, would you have considered this program & schedule?

-Absolutely

-If I had child care

-I have no day care

-Mine was like that in a way, I had to work full time day job so I had to go part time at night and on weekend

-This would have been a quicker course and the cost of it is awesome. I could pay this back in a few months verse years.

-Not sure it is long enough

-I think it would depend on my personal situation. If it did not interfere with my time as a single parent with my children, maybe.

-If the quality of education was good

-I would not feel I would get as good of an education for \$1500.00.

-But would you be giving the quality of education of a 9month to 1 year course?

-I was a single mom with young children. Being gone at night was not an option for me

-I already was in mine that cost less

-I preferred a college environment with an AA degree

-I preferred the college training as I believe I received better training.

-Due to my circumstances, that would not have worked for me. If I didn't have a child it probably would work out fine and the price sounds good.

-I wish this was available for an LVN program

-It depends on my schedule

-Given the amount of materials covered in my program I would not have taken this option.

-Learning at a slower more thorough pace helps a person retain and comprehend the information better.

-Yes but I need something else... like for LVN, I am ready for the next step.

-It would have worked out very well for me

Appendix D-3 Comments for Question 24:

Question: What advice would you provide prospective Medical Assistants considering entering the field?

- Don't get an AA degree through a vocational school because most units don't transfer
- Get hired at big medical facilities as Kaiser, Sutter, and UCD etc.
- If you Love helping people, this is for you but remember helping people isn't always list on your job description it what comes out of your heart to do for someone else.
- It's worth it to get your feet in the door to work up to something better
- The program is worth doing and you will gain a lot of experience and can take that experience anywhere and become whomever you want.
- Make sure the school you choose offers the right type of accreditation for the jobs that you want to apply for. Thoroughly inspect the externship program and if there are job opportunities at the externship sites.
- Be sure you have a passion to serve people/patients. Be sure you research out the various pay levels of all major health care companies. Know what you are getting into with your loans if you choose to enter into a program with high cost. Above all be sure you love what you will be doing as a Medical Assistant. At the end of the day even with a loan being paid off little by little I love my job as a Medical Assistant. I love working with patients-it is rewarding and fulfilling. I would encourage people to be sure this is where their passion is and if so, to stay committed to it and pursue it and then go be the best MA you can be!
- Make sure this is something you really would enjoy. There is a lot of commitment involved in this field form the school work to the job. You have someone else's life in your hand so make sure this is something you want to do.
- Go for your RN
- Make sure this is what you want to do. It might be better to take a RN program instead
- Take additional classed in field, science, math and psychology
- Watch your debt education ratio- apply for grants and scholarships. Approach a FQHC to determine if you are eligible for a student payback program.
- DO it for the love of people, not the money.
- Consider all options including the RN program, talk to counselor.
- Stay focus and the end result is rewarding

Appendix D-3 Comments for Question 24: (continued)

Learn as much as you can and really pay attention at your extern. Medical Assistants that have been in the field have a lot to teach you.

-Research the school and obtain recommendations before enrolling.

-Are you wanting to do it for the right reason? Are you doing it for a job or to help others?

-This is a career choice where personal satisfaction will outweigh financial benefit!

-Work hard from your heart. It makes you feel good that you are in a field where you can make difference by providing excellent patient care

-Gain as much experience as possible through volunteering and be sure to network with different people- you never know somebody who may know somebody. Also, don't settle for a job just because you don't think you can get something better

-Easy and short term program and great job scope. Very good pay if you work for a big company like Sutter.

-Be teachable

-Work/study hard. Be confident and develop thick skin.

-Find a school that will put you in an externship position for more than one month

-Research all the schools offering the program.

-It's a lot of information to take in, but I got great on the job training.

-Would advise to look at the big picture. What paying back loans will look like once completed.

-I would advise the medical assistants to try to do the program at a community college because it would be a lot more inexpensive so they don't have to be stuck with a huge student loan after they graduated.

-Just Do It!!!!

-Make sure you research the program you are planning to attend prior to enrolling.

-Be passionate about it. It is a very rewarding profession.

-To make sure that you have a passion for medicine and helping care for others. If money is your motivator than medicine is not for you!

-To go to a college program as I believe you receive better training than a rushed course. You come out with a better work ethic due to longer externship. I had both office and hospital outpatient.

-There are so many education loans available. Do your homework and find which one is right for you. The program you choose will help you, so take advantage of that service. Listen and learn, it's a very rewarding field.

-Make sure that this is the right spot for you. People who are lazy won't be successful in a fast paced and hard-working field.

-Stay at the top of your class if you want a good externship. Advocate for your own externship (you want to get in with a big company not private practice as they often use their externs as free work instead of training them and have no intention of ever hiring them). Do EVERYTHING you can during your externship. Learn everything you can. It is best if you can get hired from your externship. If you do great the supervisors will help you find a position and staff will write you letters of recommendation.

-Be consistent, be able to multi task and never cut corners.

-Look at your internship as a job interview

-If you are not ready to choose a four year degree program --a steppingstone into stable environment and a good job in a great environment is a medical assistant certificate. Just make sure you really have a passion for working with patients.

-I would advise them to honestly think about what they want to accomplish in their healthcare career. If their long term goals are to pursue a career in nursing I would not advise them to enter the medical assisting field. I would direct them to an LVN program they would have a better career ladder and more career options.

-Know your scope of practice.

-I would say, go for it. If you are young and need the experience, you can always go back to school for higher education and to advance your career.

-If your ultimate goal is to become a nurse then just go straight for that.