Vermont State Board of Nursing
Position Statement

The Role of the RN and LPN When Working with Medical Assistants

Question: What is the role of the RN and LPN in delegating, supervising, and working on a healthcare team with medical assistants?

Definition(s):

Medical Assistant:
A person who performs administrative and/or clinical duties to support the work of medical professionals in various healthcare settings. Medical assistants are not licensed or regulated in Vermont. Their educational preparation and scope of practice are not regulated in Vermont or defined in Vermont law or regulation.

Background:

Medical assistants may perform a wide range of duties in medical offices and healthcare facilities. Administrative duties may include scheduling appointments, greeting patients, updating records, and handling billing and other office functions. Clinical duties may include preparing procedure rooms, preparing patients for examinations, taking medical histories, collecting and testing laboratory specimens, performing phlebotomy, removing sutures, changing dressings, administering medications, assisting medical providers, and providing patient education (American Association of Medical Assistants, n.d.).

Entry-level education for medical assistants may vary from on-the-job training to post-secondary programs granting a certificate, diploma, or associate’s degree. National certification is available through several accredited certifying organizations.

Organizations are encouraged to have clear job descriptions for MAs.

Position Statement which Reflects Nurse’s Roles and Responsibilities:

Delegation:

RNAs and LPNs may delegate nursing procedures to medical assistants. The Vermont Board of Nursing provides guidance for this function in the position statement on the Role of the Nurse in Delegating Nursing Interventions (https://www.sec.state.vt.us/media/484500/PS-Role-of-Nurse-in-Delegating-Nursing-Interventions-2014-0414.pdf).

Supervision:

RNAs and LPNs may be assigned to supervise medical assistants. Before accepting the responsibility to supervise unlicensed personnel, the nurse is advised to obtain in writing (1) the responsibilities of the supervising nurse and (2) the individual scope of practice of each person to be supervised. The supervising nurse should verify documented competency of the medical assistant to perform all clinical tasks. The supervising nurse should observe and monitor the medical assistant’s practice and verify continuing competence on a regular basis. If the supervising nurse believes the medical assistant has exceeded his or her individual scope of practice or has failed to conform to standards of practice, the nurse must address the issue in a timely manner with the medical assistant and facility management.

Healthcare team membership:

Increased complexity and use of technology in healthcare have contributed to the evolution of team-based care, which involves clinicians of varying professions and skill sets collaborating to assure safe, effective, efficient, and coordinated care. Team members often include licensed professionals as well as unlicensed personnel, such as medical assistants.
Maximizing team effectiveness involves identifying patient needs and taking a flexible approach to meet the needs by utilizing team members’ expertise within their scopes of practice (Mitchell et al., 2012). When nurses are unsure about any team members’ scope of practice, functions, or responsibilities on the team, they should ask for information and discussion about these issues.

Nurses can enhance their effectiveness as members of multidisciplinary teams by learning and demonstrating skills in communication, collaboration, and constructive conflict resolution (Gardner, 2005). Effective team-based health care involves shared patient care goals, clear roles, mutual trust, effective communication, and data-driven evaluation and improvement of care processes (Mitchell et al., 2012).

Related Vermont Board of Nursing Position Statement:


References/Citations:


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This opinion is subject to change as changes in nursing practice occur.