MindTap® Teaches Future Medical Assistants the Skills Employers Want
Every employer wants to hire “dream candidates”—individuals who are conscientious and proficient in the broad range of skills required for their professions. It’s a safe bet that most students hope to be confident and career-ready candidates when they enter the job market. These days, however, more students are questioning whether their college education will “pay off” in terms of preparing them for their dream jobs in their chosen profession. And many business leaders believe that college graduates lack the skills necessary to succeed.

To better understand the skills Medical Assisting and Medical Billing, Insurance, and Coding employers look for in recent graduates, Cengage’s marketing team interviewed 17 employers at the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) and Optum Essentials conferences. The team’s questions related to the importance of certifications, medical knowledge, and soft skills. In a separate Today’s Student study, Cengage surveyed and interviewed 5,000 students (across all disciplines) about their impressions of success, career prospects, technology, courses, and obstacles to achieving academic goals.

This paper reviews the highlights of both studies, and summarizes the connections between employers’ needs and students’ expectations. It also discusses how higher education learning resources can help to equip students in Medical Assisting and related areas with the marketable skills that employers seek in their new hires.

**SOFT SKILLS MATTER**

Employers overwhelmingly agreed that successful candidates must have strong communication and interpersonal skills (soft skills). Given the immense amount of time new hires will spend with patients, this finding isn’t surprising. In fact, a candidate’s demeanor can make or break a hiring decision for participants. “When I’m in the interview, it’s more about behavior, the attributes and how the candidates present themselves,” said one participant.

Soft skills are so important that “positive attitude” ranked first when participants were asked what skills they looked for in candidates (Figure 1). Participants made it clear that patients are at the center of their practices, and positive interactions with them are key. “Candidates have to be able to relate to patients. You have to be able to talk and...communicate with them,” said one participant. “Interaction with patients is foremost because you’re dealing with so many attitudes and personalities,” said another.
Figure 1. Skills Sought by Employers in Medical Assisting and Related Areas

Which of these professional skills do you look for in a candidate?
Select all that apply.

- Positive attitude
- How to interact with co workers
- Computer literacy
- Appearance
- How to interact with a patient
- Behavioral skills and attitudes
- How to answer the phone
- Cell phone use
- Other

KNOWING THE BASICS

The survey participants expect new hires to have basic medical terminology, pharmacology, and anatomy knowledge. They said they rely on Medical Assistants to be able to solve problems, and that having a basic understanding of medical terminology and pharmacology are required. “I want [candidates] to have a little bit of background on knowing what to do and what to look for,” said one participant. Employers also believe it is very important for a new hire as a Medical Assistant, Biller, or Coder to have an understanding of what the practice provides. “Basic health sciences, basic medical terminology, just health care background in general are important. Even if it’s just anatomy and physiology... so Medical Assistants understand what the doctors are providing,” said one participant.

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STUDENTS WANT COLLEGES TO DO BETTER AT JOB PREPARATION

According to findings in the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies’ most recent annual survey of students entering a four-year college, 87.9% of students cited getting a better job as the reason to attend college, up from 67.8% in 1976. Most of those students believe the choice to attend college will enable them to make more money.

Job or career preparation was a top reason for attending college for 69% of the Today's Student survey respondents. Four-fifths (82%) of the students indicated their overall college experience was positive. However, the much lower percentage of “extremely satisfied” students (31%) indicates that higher education is missing something when it comes to creating a great experience. This likely is a result of five primary factors uncovered in the survey:

1. Students go to college to get the job they want.
2. The overall college experience does not cater to that expectation.
3. A disconnect exists between the college curriculum and what students feel they need to be learning to be successful in the job they want.
4. There is a gap between the skills that students learn and what employers want.
5. The classroom experience does not create the optimal learning environment for students to obtain what they feel they will need to be successful in their careers.

In other words, although students of all ages are looking to college to get them ready for work, something in the equation isn’t working; students maintain that their college experience doesn’t tie closely enough to their career goals. In fact, 84% of respondents call it “somewhat difficult” to achieve their own definition of success. For respondents that indicate “the job” will be their most important measure of success after college, only 37% grade the relevance of their curriculum as “A.” For the same population, 51% grade their confidence in getting a job as “A.” When looking at the two factors together, 22% grade both factors as “A.” This highlights the failure of colleges today with respect to their role in preparing students for the workplace.
The students’ concerns are echoed by a 2014 study conducted by Northeastern University indicating that 87% of business leaders nationally believe today’s college graduates do not possess the skills necessary to succeed.

**Percentage of business leaders who think college grads lack skills for success**

- 87%

**Percentage of students who attend college for job or career preparation**

- 69%

**Percentage of students who give their curriculum an “A” for career relevance**

- 37%

**Employers overwhelmingly agreed that successful candidates must have strong communication and interpersonal skills (soft skills).**

**MINDTAP® HELPS BRIDGE THE SKILLS GAP**

Cengage offers several MindTap® solutions in Medical Assisting that address students’ and employers’ concerns about career readiness. MindTap provides an easy-to-use platform with real-world simulations that allow learners to practice concepts in a safe virtual work environment, preparing future employees for their profession by increasing comprehension and critical thinking skills. Learning activities such as taking blood pressure or coding an actual case study engage students and simulate real-world environments.

The simulations and critical thinking activities within MindTap are also designed to help learners develop the professionalism skills needed to transition to the real world. The MindTap learning environment provides skills assessment, fosters confidence, and builds an understanding of job responsibilities. Through realistic depictions of the medical office environment and skills, learners gain essential skills training prior to stepping into their first position.
Future Medical Assistants also need solid grounding in foundational health care courses. MindTap maps to course outcomes with engaging activities that correlate to those outcomes. These activities are gradable and assignable, and help students master the understanding of basic health knowledge — the human body, medical terminology, and pharmacology — and how it correlates to their health care profession. Simulations engage students in applying the theory they’re learning to professional practice while reinforcing the concepts.

APPLIED, STANDARDS-ALIGNED DIGITAL LEARNING SOLUTIONS FOR MEDICAL ASSISTING

Two new MindTap products help to prepare future Medical Assistants for professional employment. Both feature interactive content and simulations aligned and mapped to current ABHES standards and the 2015 CAAHEP standards. Both also include quizzing in the style of certification exams so readers gain both familiarity with the exam format and confidence when preparing for certification. With MindTap for Michelle Blesi’s Medical Assisting: Administrative and Clinical Competencies, 8th Edition, readers develop the critical cognitive (knowledge base), psychomotor (skills), and affective (behaviors) competencies that entry-level medical assistants need.

- Electronic health records (EHR) are updated throughout, and students learn the latest information on nutrition, the Affordable Care Act (ACA), and ICD-10.
- Content covers important personal growth topics such as professionalism, teamwork, and time management.
- Patient Education boxes draw students’ attention to important issues to discuss with patients before and during tests and examinations.
- Clinical Pearl boxes offer real-world perspectives to complement the readings.

Medical Assistants must perform complex tasks, possess strong computer and
patient screening skills, and communicate effectively. MindTap for Michelle Heller’s *Clinical Medical Assisting: A Professional, Field Smart Approach to the Workplace*, 2nd Edition, gives students confidence and helps them to develop problem-solving skills and master the necessary clinical competencies and technical skills.

- Step-by-step procedures include rationales for each action, illustrations, progress note documentation samples, and behavioral components required for successful completion.
- Students get in-depth electronic medical records training with EHR technology and its use reinforced and illustrated throughout.
- Solve the Case scenarios test students’ knowledge while engaging them in critical thinking.
- New chapters highlight health coaching and patient navigation, and specialty procedures.

**CONCLUSION**

Students and employers agree that higher education must do more to align the knowledge and skills students learn with the knowledge and skills employers want. For future Medical Assistants, MindTap answers the call with interactive activities and simulations that help them learn fundamental knowledge and skills that give them an advantage in today’s competitive workplace.

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Cengage is the education and technology company built for learners. The company serves the higher education, K-12, professional, library and workforce training markets worldwide. Cengage creates learning experiences that build confidence and momentum toward the future students want. The company is headquartered in Boston, MA with an office hub in San Francisco. Employees reside in nearly 40 countries with sales in more than 125 countries around the world. Visit us at cengage.com or find us on Facebook or Twitter.

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