

NATIONAL CERTIFICATION: A DIFFERENTIATOR FOR HEALTH SCIENCE GRADUATES

By Lyndsey McDonald

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“I AM HERE TO ADD QUALITY, FOCUS AND EXCELLENCE IN THE STUDENTS’

lives,” says Rhonda Larson. “I’m here to make an impact.”

Larson, daytime instructor for the Medical Administrative Technology program at Choice High School and Technical Center in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida, has one simple goal—preparing her students to successfully enter the health-care field. Choice’s Medical Administrative Technology program is a two-year program specifically focused on the Certified Medical Administrative Assistant (CMAA) profession, considered by many to be an effective entrance into the health-care field.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the CMAA field is growing at a fast pace, with more than 275,000 new jobs expected in the field by 2020. A long-tenured educator, Larson prepares her Health Sciences students to leverage this opportunity by implementing a curriculum that covers all aspects of the job and, just as important, incorporating industry-recognized certification as part of the program.

In the world of frontline and allied

health care, credentialing acts as a third-party validation of professional competency. Aimed at promoting a higher standard of patient safety, credentialing is, for many employers, a differentiator when hiring for their frontline positions. Taking the extra step to become credentialed signals a higher level of commitment from students and future health-care employment candidates.

Larson partners with the National Healthcareer Association (NHA)—one of the nation’s largest allied health certification and preparation providers—to ensure the program’s curriculum incorporates industry standards and best practices, and prepares students to become credentialed professionals.

NHA offers eight allied health certifications, including the CMAA, which have been successfully incorporated into more than 2,400 educational programs across the country. Additionally, a growing number of high schools and technical schools throughout the United States are adding NHA certification to their pre-existing Health Sciences courses. Using the NHA test plans as a guide and developing teaching tools that are



relevant to their state standards, teachers like Larson are successfully preparing students for industry certification and lifelong career success.

At Choice High School and Technical Center, the final course in the Medical Administrative Technology program is focused on preparing students to take the CMAA exam. Students must make an 80 percent on all exams in the class in order to pass and to take the certification exam.

“Our program leads to NHA certification,” Larson says. “We assume our students will pass the CMAA at the end of the program. When we position this to our students, we help them to envision the administrative medical field as a place to start in a professional environment.”

Credentialing as a Curriculum Add-On

Like Larson, Theresa Mundy from Anclote High School in Pasco County, Florida, partners with NHA, incorporating CMAA credentialing as an add-on to her certified nursing assistant (CNA) curriculum.

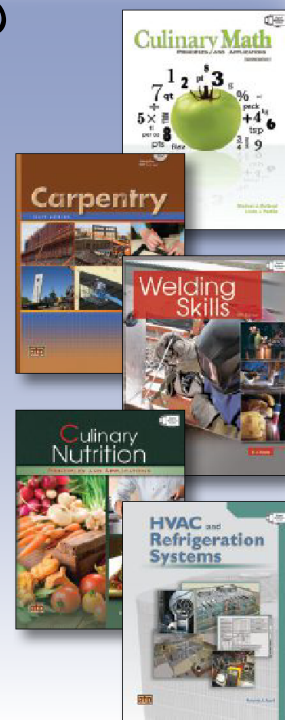
With the goal of students passing the

CMAA credentialing exam, Mundy uses various teaching techniques—reinforcing concepts, hosting lunch & learns focused on areas students struggle with, intensive remediation and review, and meeting with area colleagues to share best practices.

“I always hold the bar high. I wasn’t going to let the students test if they weren’t improving,” she explains. “It was somewhat helpful to share information [with other teachers]. We all encourage the students to be successful, like requiring A’s and B’s, [and] not accepting C’s.”

Mundy has found that her students who earned the CMAA certification are finding success in the job market. “Students are applying for and getting jobs in the medical field,” she says. “One of my students who graduated last year is Russian and spoke [very little] English when he entered the career academy three years ago. At his graduation, he came up to me, took out his wallet and flashed the four credentialing cards that he was keeping, including the CMAA. It gave me chills. He was so excited and so proud of his accomplishments. Earning these certifications truly makes the kids

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Patient Care Technician: A Solid Career Starting Point

Shannon Croft, a Health Sciences instructor at the Birdville Center of Technology and Advanced Learning, in Richland, Texas, incorporates NHA's Patient Care Technician (CPCT) certification and preparation solutions in her Health Sciences curriculum.

"The CPCT gives students something to go out and hit the ground running and jump-start their career," Croft explains. "Whether they want to go on to nursing school or work as a PCT, the certification gives them the competitive edge. I know this firsthand. I worked as a PCT and applied for nursing jobs. Having those PCT skills helped me through the interview process."

Birdville's program is two years in length. In years past, students took the credentialing practice test at the end of their second year. This year, however, Croft gave them the test at the beginning of the second year. This approach revealed curriculum areas that needed to be bolstered to facilitate students' knowledge and success. Croft enhances students' familiarity with the material by incorporating NHA's exam style and questions in her everyday teaching.

"To make sure the students are progressing through the course and preparing for certification, I like to start the class with a question from the practice test," she says. "We go through this every day. Students take turns on clinical, and when they're in the classroom, they work through the study guide."

Birdville has recently formed a new partnership with a local hospital that enables students to gain hands-on experience. The hospital hires at least three candidates at the end of each year. What's more, after six months of on-the-job training, the hospital will pay for students' advanced training in nursing.

"Students planning to go to nursing school have all been accepted. We've had a couple of students go on to be [medical assistants]," says Croft. "We are hopeful that

with this partnership we will see higher placement rates."

Croft credits part of the program's success to strong customer support from NHA. "Whenever I ask for help or to schedule an exam, everyone is very prompt and gets me what I need, no questions asked."

Health-care Immersion Throughout High School

For Cindy Robinson, Health Science Technology instructor from Robert E. Lee High School in Tyler, Texas, NHA's Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA) exam and preparation were the right additions to her curriculum. Last year—the first using CCMA materials—the pass rate was 100 percent.

Robinson maintains the key to student success is feeling confident that the program was aligned to the test plan. To accomplish that, the educators extensively reviewed the online modules provided by NHA.

"When I first started to evaluate the [preparation] modules and the test plan, I had to go back and add content to my program," she says. "I realized there were concepts covered on the exam that we were not planning to cover in our curriculum. I supplemented the online modules with other resources to make sure we touched on everything. Our experience with NHA has been amazing. Everything is user-friendly, but on top of that, the customer service is outstanding."

In Robinson's school system, Health Sciences starts in the ninth grade, with different components added each year. By students' senior year, they have been exposed to medical terminology and other advanced health-care concepts, and they are ready to prep for the NHA CCMA exam.

"These certifications give students opportunities," she says. "For some individuals, this might end up being their career. For others, it gives them the foundation to work from." **Tech**

Lyndsey McDonald is director within NHA's CTE division, and works with schools across the country to successfully implement certification and preparation into their curriculums. She can be reached at lyndsey.mcdonald@nhanow.com.