

Chapter 5

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR EXTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

Road Map to Success



- Explain the value of an externship in helping you become a successful medical assistant
- Identify the different types of externship facilities
- List the purpose and goals of the externship experience
- Explain the importance of applying the good habits you've learned in the classroom to your externship experience
- Identify ways in which you can prepare yourself for your externship mentally, physically, and professionally
- Explain how you can make a good first impression on your supervisors at the externship site
- Identify key tasks and expectations involved in an externship program
- Explain how you can protect patient rights under HIPAA during your externship

Chapter Competencies



- Project a positive attitude (ABHES 1.a.)
- Adapt to change (ABHES 1.f.)
- Be a "team player" (ABHES 1.c.)
- Maintain confidentiality at all times (ABHES 1.b.)
- Identify and respond to issues of confidentiality (CAAHEP 3.c.2.a.)

The externship is an important part of your journey to professionalism. This chapter will provide tips for making your externship a successful experience. You'll also learn the following information:

- the types of externship facilities and the benefits of the externship
- how to prepare mentally, physically, and professionally for the externship
- how to have a successful interview and make a good first impression
- how a medical office operates
- the tasks involved in the externship
- how to interact with coworkers and care for patients
- how to abide by HIPAA policies

The Externship: A Window of Opportunity

When you learn something new, you gather knowledge and experience about the subject. Knowledge is the information you need to master to reach your goals. Experience is important because it helps you test your knowledge.

As a medical assistant in training, you'll need to practice your skills before successfully completing the program. An **externship** is a period of time during which you work in a medical office while you're still a student. The externship occurs during your final term in school, usually after you've passed all other required courses in the program. It varies in length from 60 to 240 hours, depending on your school's curriculum and the medical site where you'll be working. Although you won't be paid for the work you do during the externship, you'll receive credit toward your degree or certificate plan. Here are the basic steps you'll follow to arrange your externship.

1. First, you'll select or be assigned to a particular externship site. Most medical assisting programs have a **clinical coordinator** who matches students to appropriate sites chosen by the school.
2. Next, you'll meet with your school's clinical coordinator to discuss important details about the medical facility where you'll be conducting your externship.
3. Finally, you'll be assigned a **preceptor** who will work with you at the externship site. Depending on the site, your preceptor may be a graduate medical assistant, licensed practical nurse, or registered nurse.

Under the supervision of your preceptor or supervisor, you'll have the opportunity to gain hands-on experience. Your preceptor will assist you as you apply the theories and procedures you have learned in the classroom. You'll also discover areas of medicine in which you might be particularly interested.

All aboard the Externship Express! Take a journey to discover all that awaits you in the medical assisting field.



TYPES OF EXTERNSHIP FACILITIES

The health care industry includes a wide variety of specialty offices and clinics to treat the needs of many different kinds of patients. You may complete your externship in a family or general practice facility, where you'll practice a wide range of skills. Or you may complete your externship at a specialty practice, where you'll learn the specific skills used in that particular field of medicine. Both general and specialty practices offer the experience you'll need to gain entry into the world of medical assisting.

General and Family Practices

Physicians who work in general or family practices are often referred to as primary care providers or internists. General practitioners treat a wide variety of complaints and illnesses. Family practitioners also see patients who have various illnesses; however, their patients will usually range in age from newborn to adult, whereas a general practitioner may only treat adult patients.

The advantage of completing your externship in a general or family practice is the exposure you'll have to all types of procedures performed by medical assistants, which will widen your scope of skills and abilities. If, however, you're interested in eventually working in a particular specialty, then you may not have a chance to experience the procedures and skills that are specific to that specialty. In that case, you may want to pursue your externship at a specialty practice instead.

Specialty Practices

Specialists are physicians who focus on a particular field of medicine. The following are several examples of specialists who employ medical assistants.

- Pediatricians provide medical care to children and treat childhood disorders.

- Dermatologists diagnose and treat skin disorders.
- Orthopedists diagnose and treat disorders of the musculoskeletal system.
- Obstetricians limit their practices to care and treatment for pregnancy, the postpartum (“after birth”) period, and fertility issues.
- Cardiologists diagnose and treat disorders of the heart, arteries, and veins.
- Podiatrists diagnose and treat disorders of the feet.

Because specialty practices focus on very specific areas of care, you may not experience the broad range of procedures and tasks that you would at a family practitioner’s office. For example, staff members in an obstetrics office usually don’t perform electrocardiograms, and staff members in an orthopedic office don’t perform pregnancy tests.

However, conducting your externship in a specialty practice has its advantages, too. By working in a specialty facility, you’ll gain experience in observing and performing the special examinations and procedures that you might not observe in a general practice setting. Conducting your externship in a specialty practice may make you a more desirable candidate when you are seeking job opportunities, because other medical assistants may not have had the same experience.

MENTORSHIP

If you went to summer camp as a child, then there’s a good chance you know a thing or two about the “Big Brother” and “Big Sister” programs. Your big brother or sister acted as a **mentor**, guiding you through camp life and helping you out when you needed it. Maybe you were a mentor yourself and knew how to provide a safety net for other people. Now you’re an adult, and your career goal is clear: to become a professional medical assistant. But that doesn’t mean you have to go it alone.

Your preceptor will act as your mentor throughout the externship program. Often, preceptors are medical assistants who have graduated from a medical assisting program and who have experienced a similar externship program. Preceptors work with externship students similar to the way instructors work with students in the classroom. They can provide you with valuable advice and insights about medical assisting.

Most schools have externship sites that they have used for years. Schools are careful to choose externship sites with preceptors who are willing to work with you and help you feel

comfortable in the medical setting. Until now, you've only practiced your skills inside the classroom with fellow students, so you may be nervous about leaving the comfort of a controlled setting. Preceptors understand what you're going through because they've been through it themselves. They know what it takes to ease you into the transition from classroom to medical office. Preceptors are a fountain of knowledge and resources, so never be afraid to ask for help. That's what they're there for!



Your preceptor helps cushion the experience; he will catch you if you fall!

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

Leaving the classroom and actually putting your skills to use in a medical office can be extremely rewarding, even if it seems nerve-wracking at first. Take the opportunity to absorb as much as possible from your externship experience. Think of the medical facility as your new classroom and the staff as its teachers. The medical staff is responsible for providing you with the

Travelog

WORKING WITH A PRECEPTOR



As a medical assisting student with no experience in a medical setting, I was nervous about completing the externship. I'd never practiced my skills outside the classroom or even seen some of the equipment I would be using, except in textbooks. I felt relieved when I learned that a preceptor would be working closely with us. The preceptor was so helpful! She put me at ease by explaining procedures and techniques in detail and answering my questions. Once, during training, I was asked to take an infant's blood pressure. I was so afraid of hurting him! My preceptor showed me where to place the blood pressure cuff and how to read it. I felt much better knowing that I could ask for help if I needed it. Her assistance was similar to that of the classroom instructor, which helped make my transition from the classroom to the medical office that much smoother. My preceptor was an invaluable help to me during my externship experience!

opportunities for training. The staff will also help you become familiar with office policies and procedures.

At some sites, students are only allowed to observe more complex procedures such as administering injections, but they're often given permission to perform some basic or routine procedures such as taking vital signs. Even if you aren't allowed to perform every procedure, you'll still have the opportunity to observe, take notes, and ask questions. You'll also get a feel for what it's like to work with patients and coworkers. The hands-on experience you gain during the externship will be useful to you later when you enter the medical assisting field.

Using Your Technical Skills

The first step toward engaging in any kind of hands-on experience is taking the initiative to make it happen. During the externship, learning isn't just about theory and knowledge. You'll also have the opportunity to practice the technical skills you observed in the classroom.

For some skills, you may have simply watched the instructor perform a demonstration or viewed a video of the procedure. It's understandable that you might still be unsure how to perform these procedures or tasks. Here are some tips to keep in mind when learning how to use and perfect your technical skills at the externship site.

- Take every opportunity to observe other health care professionals performing basic medical procedures. For example, you might observe a nurse drawing a blood specimen. Pay attention to the technique he uses and make mental notes of changes you can make to improve your own technical skills.
- If you're unsure how to operate a piece of medical equipment or perform a particular procedure, ask questions! Your preceptor and the other health care professionals in the office are there to help you learn.
- Refer to flash cards or pocket guides to medical assisting containing step-by-step instructions for each procedure. These reminders will help you perform each step correctly and in the proper order.
- If you're allowed to perform procedures involving needles or syringes at the externship site, do so *only* under the direct supervision of a qualified professional. If performed incorrectly, these procedures can endanger patients' safety.
- Remember that practice makes perfect. The more you practice a skill in the medical office, the more confident you'll feel, and the easier that skill will become.

You'll be judged on your ability to perform procedures by the same standard of care as is expected of an entry-level medical assistant. Your preceptor is there to help you, but it's best to come to your externship prepared. Practicing skills inside the classroom or skills laboratory first will start you off on the right foot.

Enhancing Your "Soft Skills"

The externship will also allow you to practice and enhance your "soft skills," such as communication and customer service. "Soft skills" are sometimes referred to as "people skills."

During the externship, you'll get the opportunity to work with actual patients. Doing so will help you learn how to identify and accommodate patients' different needs. By practicing these skills, you'll also learn how to provide high-quality care. For example, elderly patients with mobility difficulties may require your assistance when sitting, standing, or undressing for exams and procedures. Helping patients with these tasks requires patience and sensitivity on your part, and you'll learn how incorporating these skills into your routine can help patients feel more comfortable.

Here are some tips to help you improve your soft skills while you're working with patients.

- Be aware of your body language. Smiling while relaxing your arms and maintaining good posture shows the patient that you're friendly and ready to help.
- Be aware of patients' body language. Frowning, crossed arms, or clenched fists are all indications that the patient is uncomfortable or in pain. Recognize these signs and ask the patient, "How can I help you?"
- Think about your own medical experiences. Have you encountered health care professionals who were extremely helpful and made you feel comfortable? What did they do? How did their actions make you feel?

The externship gives you opportunities to practice your technical skills on actual patients. Your preceptor or another qualified health care professional will supervise the procedures you perform.



Ms. Young, let me show you to an examination room where you might be more comfortable waiting for the physician.



Consider how your personal experiences can help you provide better care.

- Talk to the person, not the problem. Remember that patients are real people, and their lives are about more than their illnesses. Be respectful and caring in all your interactions with patients.

SKILLS ASSESSMENT

By the end of your classroom experience, you'll have memorized and studied textbooks, observed professionals, and asked lots of questions. You may have practiced your skills so much that you're now performing them in your sleep! But will you have reached the level of a professional medical assistant?

The skills assessment is another helpful part of the externship experience. It's a tool you can use to understand where your strengths and weaknesses lie, and how you can become a better medical assistant. Your abilities and skill level will be carefully considered by your medical assisting program's clinical coordinator, who will evaluate your progress during and after the completion of the externship. At the end of your externship, you'll also complete a self-evaluation form.

Making the Grade

After you've begun your externship, your school's clinical coordinator will visit or call frequently to follow your progress. The clinical coordinator acts as a liaison between you and the externship site. If either you or the site has concerns during your externship, the clinical coordinator will mediate to help resolve any conflicts or problems that may arise.

Whereas your preceptor works with you daily as a mentor, the clinical coordinator will periodically evaluate what you've learned. The coordinator will most likely use an evaluation form that includes detailed areas to be graded. These are similar to grades you'd receive on a test or examination. Your clinical coordinator will use these evaluations to determine whether you're ready to enter the field of medical assisting or if you need additional training. You can keep track of your progress by having frequent conferences with your clinical coordinator.

Taking a Good Look at Yourself

You will complete a self-evaluation form after your externship has ended. Completing this form will help you identify your professional strengths and weaknesses. It will also help

Road Rules

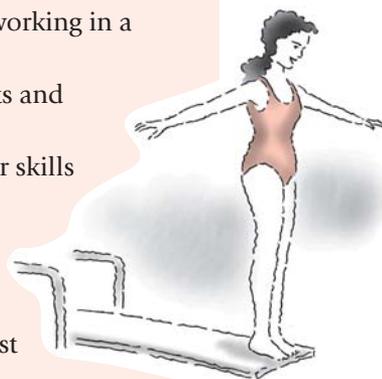


EXTERNSHIP BENEFITS

It's important to keep in mind all of the benefits of the externship. These benefits can motivate you to keep working hard toward your goal of becoming a professional medical assistant. Remember that the externship will:

- provide you with hands-on experience working in a medical office
- teach you how to work well with patients and coworkers in a medical setting
- give you the opportunity to practice your skills and learn from trained professionals
- provide you with constructive criticism so you can improve and refine your skills
- possibly help you determine your interest in a particular medical specialty

The experience you'll gain during the externship will help you "dive in" to your medical assisting career!



you determine which technical or other skills you still need to develop or enhance. Be honest with yourself as you evaluate your performance. Take the time to list the things you performed well and are proud of, as well as the things you could improve upon.

Preparing for Your Externship

Preparing for your externship isn't just about having successfully completed all the classroom requirements. It's about feeling mentally and physically prepared to face challenges and learn from the experience. To have a satisfying externship experience, you'll likely need to:

- find ways of reducing anxiety and stress
- get proper rest and nutrition
- learn to manage your time wisely
- learn how to prioritize
- seek help from family and friends

MENTAL PREPARATION

You've studied hard, you've practiced your skills, and now you're about to put your knowledge to the test in a real medical office. By now, you may feel like an old pro in the classroom, so you may be wondering, "Why do I feel so anxious now?" The externship is like any new experience; to do your best, you need to feel mentally prepared! You can't always predict what will come your way, but there are some tips and strategies you can master to curb your anxiety and keep a level head.

Avoiding Anxiety

It's normal to feel nervous the first time you talk with a patient or perform technical skills, such as taking a patient's blood pressure or giving an injection. A little anxiety probably won't affect your clinical performance, but too much anxiety can interfere with your ability to practice and learn. If you begin to feel the anxiety getting the better of you, take a minute to consider the following suggestions:

- Take a time-out. If you're feeling overwhelmed by the pressure to perform, take a step back to gather your thoughts. If possible, take a walk or get a drink of water. Return to the situation when you feel relaxed and ready to proceed.
- Be flexible. Unexpected tasks and situations will inevitably arise. It isn't always possible to plan for everything. Learning how to "go with the flow" and respond to problems as they arise will decrease your anxiety.
- Ask for help. It's better to ask your preceptor or another staff member for assistance than to perform a procedure or task incorrectly.
- Use available resources. Review your flash cards or your pocket guide to medical assisting if you're having trouble remembering something.
- Seek out new information. Don't expect others to come to you. Seeking out the answers to your questions shows courage and initiative and can alleviate the anxiety you feel about not knowing the answers.

Don't let anxiety throw you off balance! Focus on decreasing your anxiety before your performance.



Reducing Stress

Reducing stress is like losing weight—easier said than done! But there are a number of techniques

you can choose from that can reduce the stress you experience during your externship. Take a look at these tips and see which ones will work for you.

- Eliminate stressors. Many things cause stress, but the buildup of chronically stressful tasks and events can cause real health problems. So, find ways of avoiding them. For example, you might take a different route to work to avoid traffic.
- Learn how to relax. Find a comfortable position, breathe deeply, and just do nothing. Clear your mind and focus on positive thoughts or affirmations, such as “I can do this.”
- Get a massage. A good massage will relax your muscles and increase circulation, resulting in improved mental functioning. Massage also triggers the release of endorphins, the body’s natural pain relievers.
- Exercise your mind. When you’re feeling stressed, visualize yourself in a quiet, safe place. For example, see yourself in a forest. Experience the colors, the smells, and nature’s beauty. Focus on the good feelings and sensations that the image gives you.
- Learn to meditate. Focus on an object to eliminate distractions in your mind. You may choose to focus on a repetitive sound, a peaceful image, or deep breathing exercises. Meditation will decrease worried thoughts.
- Practice yoga. Yoga combines mental, physical, and spiritual energies to promote health and wellness. The basic components of yoga include proper breathing, movement, and posture, all of which enhance your energy level.
- Take a walk. Walking increases blood flow to the brain, allowing you to think more clearly. Walking also gives you time to “decompress” and think about the day’s activities.
- Exercise regularly. Regular exercise increases endorphins, the feel-good chemicals in your brain. Exercise also strengthens your body, increases your energy during the day, and helps you sleep better at night.
- Take a bubble bath. Fill a tub with warm water and let the day’s troubles wash away.
- Learn Tai Chi. Tai Chi is a martial art and type of exercise that promotes health and longevity.

Learning how to deal with and let go of stress during your externship will help you later when you’re working as a medical assistant. Pay attention to the ways in which your instructors,

coworkers, and other experienced professionals handle stress. Ask them if they have any suggestions for you.

PHYSICAL PREPARATION

So you've reduced your anxiety and eliminated some of the stressors in your life. Your mind is clear and ready for action, but what about the rest of you? Your body demands just as much care and attention as your brain. Taking the time to prepare physically for your externship will lead to:

- increased efficiency and skillfulness
- better memory retention
- improved learning and mental activity

Diet and Exercise

An important part of physical preparation is being mindful of your diet and exercise habits. Eating a healthy, balanced diet and getting enough exercise every day will give you the energy you need to meet the demands of your externship. Follow these healthful suggestions to keep your body in top shape.

- Remember that every little bit helps. Exercising a few times a week or even keeping up with a daily regimen of stretches in the morning can help lower stress, keep you alert, and help you feel good.
- Choose an activity you enjoy. Running several miles can burn a lot of calories, but if you don't enjoy it, then you're less likely to do it consistently.
- Reduce your caffeine intake. It may keep you awake, but caffeine also stimulates the sympathetic nervous system and produces tension and anxiety, making you more tired and stressed in the long run.
- Curb your sweet tooth. Avoid sugary foods, because they can lead to sudden increases and decreases in blood glucose, affecting your ability to concentrate and think clearly.

Stress can affect anyone, but developing the skills to handle life's shifting winds will keep you sailing smoothly through your externship!



- Get your vitamins. During periods of stress, increasing your intake of fruits and vegetables (excellent sources of vitamins B and C and folic acid) will enhance your body's ability to cope with everyday stresses.

Remember to eat breakfast—
it gives you the fuel you need to
start your day!

Proper Rest

Eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly aren't the only ways to increase your energy. During sleep, your body replenishes its energy sources, so you wake up feeling refreshed and ready to start the day. However, if you don't get enough sleep, you won't feel rested, and your ability to perform well and handle stress will be compromised. Follow these tips to get better shut-eye.

- Get at least eight hours of sleep every night. Lack of sleep will catch up with you, causing you to "crash" later in the day.
- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day. This kind of routine will train your mind and body to stay on track.
- Avoid caffeine for several hours before bedtime. Try to relax and "wind down" before going to bed.
- Listen to your body. If you're feeling sleepy, then go to bed. Sometimes, it's more important to get that extra hour of sleep than to finish a small task.

Some people have difficulty falling or staying asleep. If this sounds like you, then you might consider consulting your physician to determine why you're having trouble sleeping and what you can do about it.



Vaccinations

Getting the appropriate vaccinations is another way that you're expected to prepare your body for the externship experience. Your medical assisting program is responsible for maintaining liability insurance for students during their externship. Because of this, students are generally required to provide proof of general immunizations and vaccination for hepatitis B. Students are allowed to provide proof by way of blood titer as well as documentation.

Required vaccinations include proof of MMR vaccination and chickenpox (disease or vaccination). Some facilities provide the hepatitis B vaccine for students. Most programs also require a:

- current physical examination
- serology profile (immunization record)
- tuberculin skin test

These requirements usually must be met before you are admitted to the externship program or before having direct contact with patients. Preparing for these requirements and meeting all deadlines will keep you on the right track toward completing your externship.

Other Factors

Keep in mind that some extern sites require drug screens and criminal background checks before beginning your work on site. It's important to comply with these procedures so that you may participate in the externship to the fullest of your ability.

PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION

You can also prepare for the externship by doing many of the same things that prepare you for your work in the classroom. The habits that work well for you as a student can also apply to the externship. They might include:

- managing your time
- establishing priorities
- asking for help

Time Management

The externship experience will make new demands on your time and energy. It's important to understand how much time to reserve for professional and personal activities so you can plan ahead. Managing your time wisely is an important skill that will also help you:

- decrease your stress and anxiety
- organize and complete your tasks so they meet all expectations
- balance your professional, personal, and social activities
- keep on track toward completing your externship and working in the medical field

Managing your time is like managing any other aspect of your life—it takes practice and dedication. It can be easy to procrastinate or find yourself preoccupied when you should be completing a task. Some people are very organized and decisive, whereas others are content to work on many tasks at once or allow themselves to get caught up in the flow of events as they unfold. Both styles can be effective, but it's important to understand how they influence the way you manage your time. Once you understand how much time to devote to certain tasks

Road Rules

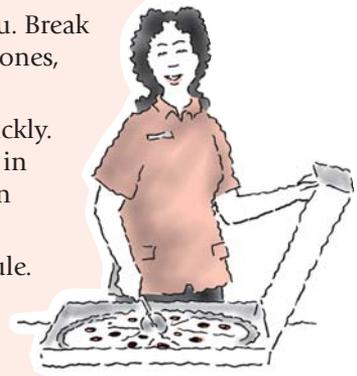
MANAGING YOUR TIME WISELY



Have you heard the old saying, “Time flies when you’re having fun”? Well, it can be just as true when you’re trying to juggle several tasks at once! Before you know it, half the day is gone and you haven’t accomplished nearly as much as you had set out to do. Does this sound familiar? If so, here are some tips to help you manage your time wisely.

- Write things down on a personal calendar. A calendar will help you keep track of all of your obligations and important dates. It will also help you plan ahead.
- Avoid spending too much time on noncritical tasks. These tasks can become distracting, and before you know it, you’ve neglected the larger, more important tasks on your list.
- Avoid allowing large tasks to intimidate you. Break large tasks down into smaller, manageable ones, and you’ll avoid the urge to procrastinate.
- All work and no play can stress you out quickly. Likewise, neglecting your externship duties in favor of personal pursuits will rob you of an enriching learning experience.
- Allow some breathing room in your schedule. Compulsively looking at the clock can stress you out even more than having too much to do.

Manage your time by slicing large tasks into smaller ones.



and which tasks are the most important to you, you’ll be better able to manage your time. But time management is also a life skill, so it’s something you should always try to work on and improve.

Establishing Priorities

As a student, you are asked to manage many activities and obligations at the same time. Going to classes, studying and preparing for class, working, participating in sports or clubs, fulfilling family obligations, and exercising are just a few of the things that may be included on your to-do list. Trying to fit all those activities into one day can seem difficult enough. And

now you're planning to add one more thing to that list: your externship. How are you going to complete all these tasks without becoming overly stressed? There are only so many hours in a day, so it's important that you establish priorities. Prioritizing means deciding which activities are the most and least important, and managing your time accordingly. Here are some useful tips to follow when prioritizing.

- Make a list of all the things you need to accomplish within a given time frame. For example, if you need to accomplish several tasks between the hours of 8:00 A.M. and 12:00 P.M., group those tasks together on your daily to-do list.
- Be realistic. Avoid scheduling too many tasks in one time period; it will just encourage you to procrastinate!
- Ask yourself, "Which of these tasks are the most important or urgent?" and, "Which tasks can be saved for later?" Complete the high-priority tasks first.
- Delegate a task or activity to someone else when possible. For example, when working on a group project, you shouldn't feel responsible for every task. Share the workload with others when you can.
- Be flexible. You may have to adjust your priorities if a new situation arises, such as a deadline change or family emergency.
- Simplify your life. Cut out activities and distractions that clutter your schedule. Don't be afraid to say "no" to some tasks or activities that are less important or beneficial for you.

Above all, remember: nobody's perfect! Avoid being too hard on yourself. Your externship isn't a race to the finish line, so pace yourself. You may not be able to complete every task, but if you set priorities, you'll know which tasks are most important and which you can save for another day.

Help from Family and Friends

Enlisting the support of your family and/or friends can be extremely important as you work your way through the externship process. Let your loved ones know when you'll be busy, and don't be afraid to ask for their help when you need it. Reaching out to others when you feel overwhelmed can lower your stress level and help you find solutions.

For example, if you have young children, you could ask a friend to babysit when you have another obligation to fulfill. Your loved ones will probably be happy to help you in any way they can. But if you're feeling unsure, have a sincere and hon-

Fork in the Road

KEEPING YOUR BALANCE



Suppose your externship is taking a lot of your time and energy, and you're having a hard time balancing other life priorities. What should you do? In three to five sentences, list some suggestions for how you would handle the situation.

est talk with your family and friends, and let them know how you're feeling and how they can help. Decreasing the anxiety in your personal life will relieve some of the anxiety you may have about the externship.

DOWN TO THE LAST DETAIL

As you're well aware of by now, preparation is the key to having a successful externship experience. It's important to tie together any loose ends before you begin the externship. Here are some things to consider.

- *Transportation.* Will you have reliable transportation to and from the externship site every day? If you don't have a car, do you have access to public transportation? Can you arrange to carpool with someone else?
- *Child care services.* If you have young children, will they have a safe and reliable place to stay while you're at the externship site? Asking a friend or relative for help may be cost effective. Consider all your options.
- *Coverage.* Is there a backup system in place in case your child is sick, dismissed early, or if school is cancelled due to inclement weather? Form a backup plan and talk to your child about it.
- *Financial support.* Will you have financial coverage in case you have to miss some hours from work due to your externship? Do you have the full support of your boss and coworkers, and are they aware of this change in your schedule?

Beginning Your Externship

You've prepared for the externship like you would prepare for a test, and now the day to begin has finally arrived. You're ready to show everyone what you're made of. But beginning your

externship is more than just learning a few basic procedures. It's about being prepared to do your best every single day. Beginning your externship will require that you:

- learn interview techniques
- make a good first impression
- dress professionally and manage your appearance
- maintain good attendance
- keep a positive attitude

THE INTERVIEW

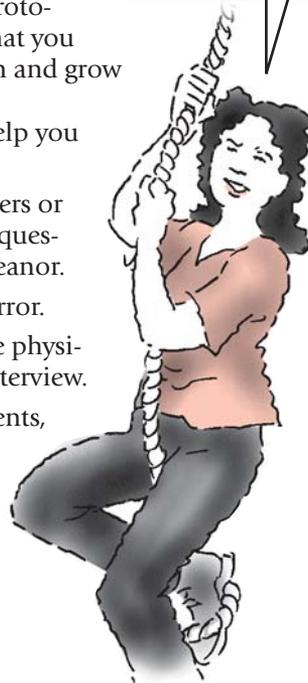
Before beginning your externship, you may have an interview at the site with the physician and/or office manager. This interview is the first opportunity you'll have to make a good impression. So, treat this interview as if it were an actual job interview. What will you say? How will you represent yourself? Learning the proper protocol for interviews will let your supervisors know that you see the externship as a serious opportunity to learn and grow as a medical assistant in training.

The following are some general guidelines to help you have a successful interview.

- Practice the interview first with family members or friends. Have them ask you typical interview questions, and practice developing a relaxed demeanor.
- Rehearse what you might say in front of a mirror.
- Remember to be polite. Shake hands with the physician or office manager before and after the interview.
- Sell yourself. Be proud of your accomplishments, and don't be afraid to share them.
- Have a good grasp of your strengths and weaknesses. If the interviewer asks, explain what your weaknesses are and what you plan to do to improve your skills.

You'll learn additional interview tips in Chapter 6.

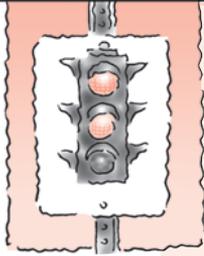
Know your own strengths and weaknesses so you can climb your way to success during the interview.



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

First impressions are lasting. When you meet someone new, you form an opinion of that person based on how he looks, behaves, and interacts with other people. It's important to make a good first impression on your preceptor, clinical coordinator, and supervising physician. Remember that these individuals will be evaluating your level of commitment and qualifications based on the externship site's standards, or criteria.

Signs & Signals



MAKING A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

Follow these tips to make an outstanding first impression:

- Smile and greet others warmly.
- Remember people's names and use them when communicating.
- Communicate your desire to help.
- Display "open" body language. Keep your arms uncrossed, make eye contact, and have a pleasant smile.
- Listen attentively and don't interrupt others who are speaking. Add a comment or ask questions when appropriate.
- Be sincere and honest.
- Speak clearly and thoughtfully.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR PRECEPTOR

As you begin your externship, strive to build a professional relationship with your preceptor. If the preceptor feels that you're a dedicated student, he will be more inclined to devote the time and energy into assisting you. Your preceptor was once where you are now, so he probably understands what you're going through. Make an effort to build a rapport with your preceptor, and he may be more willing to help you when you need it!

There are several things you can do to get to know your preceptor.

- Ask him how he prefers to be addressed. Some preceptors prefer a title (for example, "Mr. Jones"); others are comfortable with you using their first name.
- Ask how your preceptor got into the field of medical assisting, including where he went to school and what positions he has held. Remember, he may have professional contacts who can help you network and find a job later.
- Express interest in your tasks and ask the preceptor how he handles challenging situations. Ask, "How can I be a more successful medical assistant?"

DRESSING FOR SUCCESS

Looking your best promotes confidence and a positive attitude. Plus, feeling confident will encourage you to do a professional

job. A messy, disheveled appearance gives the impression to others that you don't care about the work that you do.

For your externship, you may be asked to wear a uniform or follow a specific dress code. If the externship site requires clothing that differs from your school's requirements, you are usually asked to comply with the site's requirements. Here are some other helpful hints to consider when dressing for the externship.

- If you must wear a uniform, make sure it's freshly laundered and pressed. A clean but wrinkled uniform isn't acceptable.
- Avoid wearing clothing that is trendy or suggestive. This kind of clothing isn't appropriate for the externship site.
- Check your clothing to make sure it's in good condition, with no missing buttons, falling hems, rips, tears, or stains.
- Wear clean, appropriate shoes. Laced shoes look better with clean laces.
- If you wear nylon hosiery, check for runs and snags and replace as needed.
- If you have long hair, make sure it's pulled back from your face. Wash it often so that it looks and smells clean.
- If you wear makeup, keep it minimal and make sure it's tastefully applied.
- Avoid wearing perfume or cologne, as this can trigger an allergic reaction in some patients and coworkers.
- Keep fingernails short to avoid transferring pathogens (germs) or ripping gloves when you perform procedures.
- Wear only minimal, tasteful jewelry. Rings can puncture gloves, so it's a good idea to avoid wearing them to the externship site.
- Limit earrings to small studs, and check your facility's policy concerning the number of earrings that may be worn in each ear.
- Remove or conceal any body jewelry and cover any tattoos.

Wrinkles are cute on puppies, but not on uniforms. Be sure to iron those creases!



Your preceptor or clinical coordinator will inform you of the dress code in advance. Be sure to ask any questions you may have about dress before your externship begins.

BEING THERE

Looking your best doesn't help you gain the experience you need unless you're regularly attending your externship sessions. It's important to plan on attending all your externship sessions so you can learn as much as you can and improve your skills. Also, the staff in the medical office depends on you, and it is important to be reliable. Remember that your attendance will be taken into account when the clinical coordinator makes her final evaluation.

Maintaining good health is essential because it will decrease your chance of catching an illness and having to call in sick. A healthy diet, regular exercise, and proper rest will give your immune system a boost. Careful attention to hygiene and medical asepsis, such as washing your hands before and after all procedures, will help you avoid bringing illnesses home from the externship site.

To maintain a good attendance record, you need to prepare to be ready and on time for every session. Here are some suggestions to help you do that.

- Office hours vary from site to site; it's always a good practice, however, to arrive a few minutes before the scheduled session. This allows time to check for phone messages, turn on office equipment, and gather any necessary materials.
- Plan your transportation ahead of time, and have a backup plan in case that fails.
- Leave plenty of time for any delays that might occur. Arriving at the site feeling frustrated by distractions, with no time to ease into the day, can cause anxiety and tension.
- Set aside time before each shift to mentally prepare. If you're feeling anxious or tense, it's more difficult to provide compassionate care to patients and deal with complex problems in the medical office.

ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING

Your education has provided you with the knowledge and the technical skills you'll need to do your job. But no matter how good your technical skills are, having a poor attitude can make all the difference in your overall performance. During your externship, your attitude is reflected in:

- the way you perform each task
- your attendance
- your appearance

Running Smoothly**EXTERNSHIP PROTOCOL**

What if you know you're going to be late or unable to attend a scheduled session?

If at any time you will be late or unable to attend a scheduled session, you must notify both the clinical coordinator and your preceptor. Almost all sites have an answering service for leaving messages. Memorize the site's phone number or program it into your cell phone. There is no excuse for failing to notify all parties involved if you will be late or absent.

If for some reason you can't call in when you're going to be absent, have a friend or family member call in for you.



A positive attitude is infectious; when you project a positive attitude, others around you will begin to feel good also, and you will be better able to work together to accomplish your goals. On the flip side, a negative attitude has the exact opposite effect on patients and coworkers. When your attitude is negative, it makes others feel bad or unimportant. Make an extra effort to stay upbeat during your externship sessions. A positive attitude keeps you focused on what you're learning.

In part, your attitude is affected by how well you handle change and how adaptable and flexible you are when new or unusual situations arise. The medical profession is constantly changing, so you have to stay flexible to meet its demands. For example, in the classroom, you learned certain methods for treatments and procedures. But at the externship site, you may find yourself being asked to perform different procedures, either because the office uses newer technology, or simply because different offices perform the same tasks in slightly different ways. If you are not ready to adjust to change, you may begin to feel unsure of yourself or frustrated, and this could lead you to project a negative attitude.

Your attitude can determine how far you go in the medical field. Students who work with a positive attitude during their externship are more likely to reach higher levels of professional success than those who see the externship as a burden or difficulty.

Completing Tasks During Your Externship

Part of the medical externship is preparation, and the other part includes all the tasks you'll be asked to complete. But before you actually see a patient, you'll need to learn your way around the medical facility. Learning to adapt to the daily routines and procedures of the medical office will help make your externship a rewarding experience. Here are some things you'll learn:

- the medical office's layout
- coworkers' routines
- policies and procedures
- safety measures
- how to interact with coworkers
- how to interact with patients

LEARNING ABOUT THE OFFICE

It will be your responsibility to learn about the medical office in which you complete your externship. You can't always wait around for someone to tell you. Sometimes, you must decide to take action and get to know your environment. Make sure that you:

- become familiar with the office
- learn and follow office policies
- adhere to office safety procedures

Orientation

Each medical facility has its own way of doing things. The most efficient workers learn as much as they can about how their particular facility operates. So, it's important to orient yourself to the externship site where you'll be working. Doing so will help you provide better care and learn more as a student.

The following information is important to learn about your externship facility and may be included in a formal or informal orientation:

- the mission statement or goals of the medical facility
- fire and safety policies
- other emergency procedures
- standard precautions
- confidentiality rules
- computer access and password assignment (if applicable)

Here is a list of common questions you may wish to ask your preceptor or other office representative.

- Where may students park?
- Which building/door should I enter and exit through?
- Whom should I call if I'm going to be absent and when should the call be made?

Your preceptor or clinical coordinator will give you a schedule with the dates and times of your externship sessions. She will also explain written assignments and due dates. Be sure to ask questions if you don't understand something. Remember that the more information you gather, the more prepared you'll feel during your first externship session.

The Front Office

The first area of the medical office that you'll most likely encounter is the front office. You'll notice that the front of the facility is more like a typical office, with computers, phones, and fax machines. Get to know the front office staff; they will assist you as you learn your way around the office.

Here are some other tips to consider when learning your way around the front office.

- Learn how to use the equipment that may be unfamiliar to you, such as fax machines and copiers. If you need assistance, ask someone. Using this equipment improperly can break or damage it.
- Medical assistants complete a lot of paperwork. Learn the office's filing system, and learn how to handle patients' medical information. Know where to place folders and documents so they don't get lost and patient confidentiality is maintained.
- Seek out the resources you'll need to complete each task. Most medical offices have a room or closet where office supplies, such as pens and paper, are stored. Learn where it is, and ask about the procedure for accessing new materials.
- You may be asked to answer the phone. Know the procedures to use, such as answering with the proper greeting, placing a call on hold, and transferring a call to another staff member. Recognize emergency calls (you learned how to do this in Chapter 2) and handle them appropriately.

You'll be receiving a lot of information at first, so it's important to listen closely and take notes!



Ask The Professional**ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

Q: *I like to use my MP3 player when I'm working. Listening to music helps me relax. Can I use these devices during my externship?*

A: Using your MP3 player while you work or study at home is fine, but using these devices in a professional medical office is unacceptable. Just as you wouldn't take a cell phone call while talking with a patient, you shouldn't use electronic devices that can be distracting to others. And when you're wearing your headphones, patients and coworkers may feel uncomfortable approaching you. If you're having trouble concentrating during your externship, then try some of the relaxation techniques previously discussed in this chapter.

Office Policies

You'll also learn about the facility's *policies*. Policies are sets of general principles that must be followed. Maintaining patient confidentiality is an example of a policy; it's a goal that the facility strives for. The facility's *procedures* are based on these policies. Procedures describe a specific way in which each task should be performed. Returning all patient documents to a locked file cabinet is an example of a procedure that results from the policy of protecting confidentiality.

Your externship facility should have a policies and procedures manual. Know where this manual is located and refer to it often. Even though you learned a procedure one way in the classroom, the facility may have another method. Understanding and following your externship site's policies and procedures will make you a thoughtful and effective medical assistant in training.

Safety Procedures

The medical facility's policies and procedures are often created with the intention of keeping you and other staff and patients safe. Patients' safety is the responsibility of all members of the health care team—don't forget that this team now includes you! Be sure to familiarize yourself with the office's policies and procedures concerning safety. If you don't understand something, ask someone! It's better to be safe than sorry.

Keeping Germs at Bay

The risk of infection is always present when you work with patients. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has created a set of guidelines to provide the widest possible protection against the transmission of infection. Follow these guidelines to protect yourself and patients.

- Wash your hands before and after patient care, after removing gloves, and immediately after you have contact with a patient's blood or body fluid.
- Wear gloves if you will or could come into contact with blood or other body fluids, specimens, mucous membranes, broken skin, or contaminated objects or surfaces.
- Change gloves and wash your hands between seeing patients. When caring for the same patient, change gloves and wash your hands if you touch anything with a high concentration of microorganisms.
- Wear a fluid-resistant gown, eye protection, and a mask during procedures that are likely to generate droplets of blood or body fluid.
- Carefully handle used patient care equipment that's soiled with blood or body fluids. Follow facility guidelines for cleaning and disinfecting equipment and surfaces.
- Handle needles and sharps carefully and immediately discard in the appropriate containers after use.
- Immediately notify your supervisor if you are injured by a needle or other sharp instrument, or if you have broken skin that becomes contaminated with a patient's blood or other body fluid. Your supervisor will begin the appropriate investigation and provide necessary medical care for the incident.
- If occupational exposure to blood is likely, get the hepatitis B vaccine series.

Avoiding Equipment Injuries

Injuries due to negligent use of equipment are preventable. You're responsible for making sure the equipment you use for patient care is free from defects. Before performing or assisting with a procedure, make sure all the necessary equipment is present (not lost or missing) and in good condition (no damages or breaks). Report any possible defects to your supervisor immediately. You're also responsible for using all equipment properly, according to the externship site's policy and procedures manual. If you're unsure of a procedure, ask your preceptor for guidance.

Avoiding Other Injuries

Other injuries that can occur in the medical office include:

- back injuries
- chemical injuries
- injuries from a fall

Back injuries are common because many patient care activities require you to push, pull, lift, and carry. Use proper body mechanics to reduce the risk of injuring yourself and patients.

- Flex your hips and knees instead of bending at the waist. This position distributes weight evenly and helps maintain balance.
- Spread your feet apart.
- Move your feet, rather than twisting and bending at the waist.

Chemical injuries can happen in the medical office because of the routine use of potentially hazardous chemicals. Powerful cleaning solutions and disinfectants are the common culprits. A Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) provides you with information about the physical and chemical hazards that can occur from these substances. Each MSDS provides information about chemicals and how to treat exposure to the substances. Know where these forms are stored in the facility where you'll be working.

It's important to take measures to protect yourself and patients from falling. Some patients have an increased risk for falls, especially if they're elderly or if they're taking certain medications. Here are some tips to avoid falls.

- Make sure there are no pieces of furniture or other objects obstructing hallways or walkways in the waiting room.
- Provide adequate lighting and a clean, clutter-free area.
- Be aware of all patients who are taking medications that could increase their risk of falling.
- Assist the patient when walking, especially if he's using a cane or has other mobility issues.
- Quickly and effectively clean spills that can make the floor slippery.

Remember that safety is everyone's business, so take it seriously and be informed. It's better to ask someone about the proper safety procedures than to risk infection or injury. And if you make a mistake, tell someone immediately! Protect yourself and patients at all times.

Spread your feet apart and bend at the knees to prevent back injuries



INTERACTING WITH COWORKERS

During the clinical orientation, your preceptor or clinical coordinator will introduce you to staff members. This is the perfect opportunity to make a good impression. It's also an opportunity to learn the various roles of each member of the health care team, as well as to learn to work with many different personalities.

You'll begin to learn that each team member has a unique set of skills and abilities, and each individual has a vital role to play within the office. Remember to show an enthusiastic attitude when you interact with coworkers. Take a humble approach, realizing that you have much to learn from every member of the staff. Show respect to each member of the team and appreciate the jobs they do.

What's the Routine?

As a medical assistant in training with little experience, it will be your responsibility to learn how the office runs on a daily basis. For example, who opens up the waiting room and greets patients? Is the office closed for lunch, or does the staff alternate breaks? Who cleans examination rooms between patients? It's important to follow all physicians' and other health care professionals' instructions. They have the experience and know-how to get the job done well, so follow their lead. If you're unsure of something, ask for clarification.

Remember the three "Ls" when adapting to the medical facility's daily routine.

- *Look.* Watch other staff members as they go about their daily routines, and observe how each job is related to the others to understand how the staff works as a team.
- *Listen.* Keep an ear out for key terms or phrases repeated throughout the day. Pay attention when a staff member explains something or gives directions.
- *Learn.* Incorporate your observations by practicing skills and techniques. If you make a mistake, try again or ask someone to help you.

There Is No "I" in Team

As you learn the ropes of the medical office, you'll also learn how the staff works as a team. Team members have a common goal, and they work together to achieve it. Every team member steps up and contributes his own skills and talents to get the job done.

A team is only as good as its weakest member. That means everyone has to give 100 percent so the medical team can perform at its very best level. Show interest in being a part of the

team. Learn how to pitch in and help without being asked, and work cooperatively with others to get the job done. Offer ideas, but don't expect to be the leader of every task. Remember that you're there to learn from experienced others, so you should listen and observe instead of trying to run the show!

Remember that a team is made up of equal individuals. Every individual is important and should be heard and recognized. Some tasks are solitary and require concentration and quiet. But your performance on most of the tasks you complete in the office will depend on your ability and willingness to work with others. You'll enjoy the externship a lot more and you'll get more out of it if you become a team player.

Part of teamwork involves knowing your limitations. Sometimes, you should watch and learn from the sidelines.



Accountability

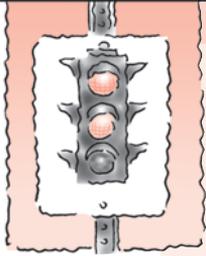
Although you'll be part of a team of health care professionals during your externship, you'll still be accountable for your own actions.

You'll also be accountable for your own learning. How much you get out of your externship depends on your willingness to learn and ask questions.

The following guidelines will help you maintain accountability during the externship.

- Show up at your externship site on time, with a professional appearance and a positive attitude. Be ready for whatever comes your way.
- If you're going to be absent, demonstrate accountability by calling the designated phone number at the appropriate time and making up any missed work within the given time frame.
- Never try to perform a skill you're unsure about or use a piece of equipment you haven't been taught to operate.
- Admit to your mistakes. Never blame something you did on someone else. Coworkers will appreciate your honesty. Learn from your mistakes, and then move on.
- Ask for help. The medical staff will be glad to answer any questions you have and offer advice. Most people will remember what it was like to be a student and will be glad to help you!

Signs & Signals



MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR EXTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

How much you get out of your externship experience depends on how much you put into it. Your skills and enthusiasm for learning will keep your externship going smoothly. Here are some ways to make sure that you get the most out of your externship experience.

- Show enthusiasm and interest in learning.
- Be curious and ask lots of questions.
- Work well and cooperate with others.
- Offer to assist with as many tasks as possible.
- Ask for clarification before performing any procedure that you're unsure of.
- Immediately admit to any errors or mistakes you make.
- Accept constructive criticism from staff members.
- Show initiative. Anticipate tasks that need to be done, and do them before you're asked.
- Avoid making negative or pessimistic remarks, such as "I will never learn to do this," or "This office is outdated."

- Communicate all concerns to a staff member. If you or someone else breaks a policy or procedure, be accountable by letting someone else know.

When your coworkers feel that you're accountable and trustworthy, they will trust you with larger matters, such as more complex procedures or tasks. In this way, you'll learn more and get more out of the externship experience.

CARING FOR PATIENTS

You finally have the opportunity to work with actual patients, and you may be feeling a little nervous. It's okay to feel this way at first. But be encouraged! You've practiced your skills, and now you're ready to use them in an actual medical office. Learning to care for patients includes knowing how to use equipment properly and being able to maintain patient confidentiality by following HIPAA rules.

Know the Equipment

The back office is the part of the facility that includes a lot of medical equipment. This is where most procedures and treatments take place.

The equipment you'll use, such as ECG machines for performing electrocardiograms and autoclaves for sterilizing equipment, may be operated slightly differently than the way you learned in the classroom. Be willing and flexible to learn new procedures for operating this equipment. Saying, "My school didn't teach me this," communicates to others that you're unable or unwilling to adapt your skills according to the facility's needs. When using medical equipment, it's also important that you follow the appropriate office procedures to protect the safety of yourself and patients. Consult the office's policy and procedures manual if you're unsure of how to operate a piece of equipment.

Maintain Patient Confidentiality

Caring for patients also includes maintaining patient confidentiality. As you learned previously in Chapter 1, HIPAA is the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. It's a federal law that protects the privacy, confidentiality, and security of all medical information. During your externship, you'll receive information about maintaining patient rights under HIPAA that's specifically tailored to the health care facility where you'll be working. Failure to comply with HIPAA, whether it's intentional or not, could result in legal action being taken against the medical office.

The following are some practices you should incorporate to uphold patient privacy.

- Protect your computer password. Avoid sharing your password with anyone.
- Log off the computer when you're finished.
- Keep patients' charts closed when not in use.
- Avoid leaving faxes and computer printouts unattended.
- Don't discuss patient information for any reason other than learning. Don't discuss patient information with family and friends. Don't gossip about a patient with other staff members.
- Keep your voice down when talking with the physician about a patient. Don't discuss a patient's information with other patients or visitors without the patient's consent.

HIPAA is like the medical constitution—it requires that you uphold and defend patients' privacy rights.



Ask The Professional



RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING TO CONFIDENTIALITY ISSUES

Q: *My coworkers routinely discuss confidential patient information during lunch breaks. They've asked me questions about patients whom I've cared for. I'm new to the office, but their behavior seems unacceptable to me. What should I do?*

A: You're absolutely right; discussing patient information, unless it is for a medical reason, is unethical. Your coworkers are jeopardizing the privacy of their patients. Don't join in as they're gossiping, and don't answer their questions. I would suggest discussing this matter in private with your preceptor or other supervisor. They'll take the necessary actions to stop this behavior.

- Remove any *patient identifiers* (such as a patient's name, Social Security number, or address) before handing in written class work.

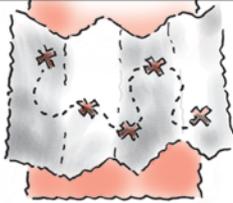
Journey's End



- The purpose of the externship experience is to practice and refine the skills that you'll use as a medical assistant.
- The different types of externship facilities include family or general practices and specialty practices.
- The externship is a valuable experience because it gives you the opportunity to work with and learn from professionals in the field.
- You can prepare mentally for the externship by learning ways to avoid anxiety and reduce stress.
- Physical preparation for the externship includes maintaining a healthy, balanced diet; exercising regularly; getting enough rest; and being sure to get the required vaccinations.
- To prepare professionally for the externship, use time management strategies, establish priorities, and enlist the help of your family members and friends.
- Make a good impression during your externship by having a positive attitude, a professional appearance, and an excellent attendance record.

- Use the same good habits that worked for you in the classroom so your externship will be just as successful.
- The key tasks and expectations involved in the externship program include learning how to work in the medical office, how to interact with coworkers, and how to care for patients.
- Protect patients' privacy rights by adhering to HIPAA policies and procedures.

Map Your Progress



Answer the following multiple-choice questions.

1. What does a *preceptor* do?
 - a. instructs your class
 - b. acts as your mentor
 - c. grades your performance
 - d. provides your financial support
2. An example of a specialty practice is:
 - a. a general practice.
 - b. a dermatology practice.
 - c. a family practice.
 - d. all of the above
3. As a student, how can you benefit from your externship experience?
 - a. You will have a chance to earn some extra money.
 - b. You will have the opportunity to teach coworkers the latest skills and techniques you've learned in the classroom.
 - c. You will gain valuable hands-on experience working in a medical facility.
 - d. none of the above
4. How can you prepare mentally for the externship?
 - a. Enlist the help of your family and friends.
 - b. Get in the habit of going to bed and waking up at the same time every day.
 - c. Eat a healthy breakfast every morning.
 - d. Find ways to avoid anxiety and reduce your stress level.
5. What can you do during your externship to make it a positive experience?
 - a. Be a curious learner and ask lots of questions.
 - b. Observe other staff members as they carry out their daily tasks and offer constructive criticism.
 - c. Point out equipment in the office that looks outdated.
 - d. Immediately correct any errors or mistakes you make without drawing attention to them.

6. Why should you keep your fingernails short during the externship?
 - a. to avoid angry stares from patients
 - b. to avoid dropping sterile equipment
 - c. to avoid transferring pathogens or ripping gloves
 - d. to avoid chipping a nail
7. *Policies* are:
 - a. sets of general principles that must be followed.
 - b. guidelines to help you control patients.
 - c. step-by-step instructions for certain tasks.
 - d. lists of rules to help you protect patients' privacy.
8. During your externship, how can you protect your own safety as well as the safety of patients?
 - a. by washing your hands frequently to prevent the spread of infection
 - b. by knowing where the MSDS forms are stored in case of accidental exposure to a chemical substance
 - c. by using proper body mechanics when lifting or moving heavy objects
 - d. all of the above
9. Admitting to your mistakes shows that you are:
 - a. accountable.
 - b. skilled.
 - c. empathetic.
 - d. organized.
10. How can you uphold patients' privacy as you go about your tasks in the medical office?
 - a. Only discuss private medical information with a patient's immediate family members and close friends.
 - b. Keep your voice down when talking with the physician about a patient.
 - c. Be sure to add patient identifiers to any written class work you're asked to submit.
 - d. Share your computer password with other office staff members, but avoid letting patients overhear it.