



## get on the dental careers path

### Is this the job for me?

Take this quick quiz to find out if dental assistant is a good direction for you:

- 1 Are you interested in helping people get and maintain good oral health?  
 YES  NO
- 2 Do you like working as part of a team?  
 YES  NO
- 3 Are you good at making people feel comfortable?  
 YES  NO
- 4 Do you like to teach and assist others?  
 YES  NO
- 5 Do you like to work with delicate tools and instruments?  
 YES  NO
- 6 Do you like to stay busy and do a variety of tasks?  
 YES  NO
- 7 Do you want to get into a career in as little as one year?  
 YES  NO

If you answered yes to several of these questions, you may be on the right track!

### What's it all about?

Dental assistants help dentists with a variety of tasks, ranging from patient care to office work to lab duties. For example, a dental assistant may prepare patients for their exam and treatment, then provide chair-side assistance to the dentist. Afterwards, a dental assistant may sterilize instruments and equipment, and record information in the patient's chart. Dental assistants may also help with billing, appointment scheduling and ordering supplies.

Dental assistants, who are often the first professionals patients come into contact with in a dentist's office, also play a key role in making sure patients feel as comfortable as possible.

### What do dental assistants do?

Tasks commonly performed by dental assistants include:

- Sterilize instruments and equipment, and prepare trays.
- Prepare patient for exams and procedures.
- Answer questions and make patients as comfortable as possible.
- Assist dentists as they examine and treat patients.
- Hand instruments and materials to dentists.
- Clear patients' mouths using suction or other devices.
- Take dental X-rays and process film.
- Record information in patients' charts.

- Teach patients about general oral health care. Provide instructions.
- Take alginate impressions.
- Place dental sealants.
- Apply fluoride to patients' teeth.
- Clean and polish removable dental appliances, such as bridges.
- Make temporary crowns.
- Schedule and confirm patient appointments.
- Keep records, send bills and take payments.
- Order dental supplies and materials.

### How much money can I make?

In Alaska, dental assistants earn an average hourly wage of \$17.66, and have an average annual salary of \$36,730.

### How do I become a dental assistant? How long does it take?

To become a dental assistant, you must:

- Have a high school diploma or GED.
- Complete a training program, which includes class work, lab work and a clinical externship.
- May become certified by taking a national certification exam.

Dental assisting programs typically offer either a certificate or an associate's degree. A certificate usually takes one year of full-time study after high school, while an associate's degree takes two to three years.

Learn more about dental assistant programs in Alaska by reviewing the "training providers" section later in this publication.

### **Attention high school students!**

Think you want to become a dental assistant? Well, the time to start planning is now. In general, you should take four years of English, three years of math, three years of social studies, two years of science and possibly two years of a second language. Other recommended classes and electives include:

- Health education
- Medical office
- Community health
- Safety and first aid
- Health care occupations
- Anatomy and physiology
- Psychology
- Computer fundamentals
- Keyboarding
- General computer applications

You should also discuss your plans with a teacher, counselor or parent, and check to see what work-based learning opportunities, such as field trips, job shadowing and internships, are available in your community.

### **Are there jobs available?**

There are currently about 45 job openings a year for dental assistants in Alaska, and this occupation is expected to continue to grow quickly (35.6 percent growth compared to 14.8 percent for all occupations).

### **Where are the jobs?**

Dental assistants in Alaska work wherever dentists practice. Most dental assistants work in private dental offices. In rural Alaska, many dental assistants work for the Indian Health Service or regional health corporations.

### **What else is on this pathway?**

Although dental assisting is the only "hot job" featured in this publication, there are several other high-demand jobs on the dental careers pathway, such as dental health aide, dental hygienist and dentist! See the "how to find out more information" section of this publication to learn more.





michelle estrella

## DENTAL ASSISTANT

When Michelle Estrella graduated from East Anchorage High School in 2006, she wanted to work on cars. Her parents wanted her to be a nurse. So they compromised, and Michelle entered the dental assisting certificate program at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA).

Turns out it was a great compromise. A year later, she graduated with a certificate in dental assisting, succeeded in her externship and is now working full-time at the Alaska Veterans Affairs Healthcare System and Regional Office.

"At first I thought this was a good job to have while I decided on what I really wanted to do, but I love my job so much that this could be my career of choice," Michelle said.

As a dental assistant, Michelle helps and cleans the operatory before and after each patient, takes X-rays and alginate impressions, pours study models, gives patients instructions, and schedules patients for their next appointments.

"There are many different things that I enjoy about my job — the friendly atmosphere, the varieties of dental procedures and the patients themselves," Michelle said. "The most enjoyable part of my

job is the teamwork between the dentist and the staff members, and even the patients. I also enjoy learning and sharing knowledge with the other assistants, because there is always something to new learn."

Michelle certainly does enjoy learning. She is currently pursuing her associate's degree in dental assisting at UAA, and expects to graduate in spring 2009. She said she is also considering additional education to become a dental hygienist.

"I chose the dental field because I always enjoyed trips to the dentist and I always thought teeth were interesting," Michelle said.

**"I also saw a direct path from the education to the employment, and I knew that this job would be great as a beginning or a career. It was the best choice for me all the way around."**





## get on the clinical services path

### Is this the job for me?

Take this quick quiz to find out if medical assistant is a good direction for you:

- 1 Do you want to learn how to perform basic medical tasks?  
 YES    NO
- 2 Are you interested in hands-on clinical work and administrative tasks?  
 YES    NO
- 3 Are you a multi-tasker?  
 YES    NO
- 4 Are you a good communicator?  
 YES    NO
- 5 Do you like math and science?  
 YES    NO
- 6 Do you like to work alone and with others?  
 YES    NO
- 7 Want to get into a career in two years or less?  
 YES    NO

If you answered yes to several of these questions, you may be on the right track!

### What's it all about?

Medical assistants help care for patients, usually in doctors' offices and clinics. Working under the supervision of physicians, medical assistants perform basic clinical duties, such as taking patients' health histories and vital signs, as well as administrative tasks, such as answering telephones and scheduling appointments. With additional training, medical assistants can specialize in areas such as ophthalmology, which gives them the skills to perform extra duties related to eye care.

### What do medical assistants do?

The responsibilities of medical assistants vary, depending on the type and size of facility they work in. For example, in a large clinic, a medical assistant may do either administrative or clinical work, while in a small practice, a medical assistant may perform both administrative and clinical duties. The following list includes a range of duties a medical assistant may be responsible for:

- Greet patients and escort them to exam rooms.
- Take patients' health histories and vital signs.
- Assist doctors during patient exams.
- Collect blood and other samples for routine lab tests.
- Prepare and administer medications, as directed by a physician.
- Change dressings and bandages. Remove stitches.

- Operate X-ray, electrocardiograph (EKG) and other equipment.
- Explain treatments, medications and instructions to patients.
- Clean exam rooms, dispose of used materials, arrange equipment and sterilize instruments.
- Complete insurance forms and maintain medical records.
- Contact other medical facilities to schedule patients for tests.
- Schedule appointments and receive payment for services.
- Check inventory, and order medical supplies and materials.
- Prepare and mail statements to patients. Update billing records.
- Take classes to keep knowledge and skills up-to-date.

### How much money can I make?

In Alaska, medical assistants earn an average hourly wage of \$15.27, and have an average annual salary of \$31,770.

### How do I become a medical assistant? How long does it take?

To become a medical assistant, you must:

- Have a high school diploma or GED.
- Graduate from a medical assisting program.
- May take a certification exam.

Medical assisting programs typically offer either a certificate or an associate's degree. Certificates usually take about one year of full-time study after high school, and associate's degrees typically take two years. After graduation, medical assistants can also become certified by taking a certification exam.

Learn more about medical assistant programs in Alaska by reviewing the "training providers" section later in this publication.

### **Attention high school students!**

Think you want to become a medical assistant? Well, the time to start planning is now. In general, you should take four years of English, three years of math, three years of social studies, two years of science and possibly two years of a second language. Other recommended classes and electives include:

- Anatomy and physiology
- Introduction to health care
- Certified nursing assisting
- Safety and first aid
- Health education
- Psychology
- Introduction to business
- Business and applied English
- Business math
- Accounting
- Computer applications
- Keyboarding

You should also discuss your plans with a teacher, counselor or parent, and check to see what work-based learning opportunities, such as field trips, job shadowing and internships, are available in your community.

### **Are there jobs available?**

There are currently about 30 job openings a year for medical assistants in Alaska, and this occupation is expected to continue to grow quickly (35.6 percent growth compared to 14.8 percent for all occupations).

### **Where are the jobs?**

Medical assistants are often employed in doctors' offices, clinics and other health care provider offices. In rural Alaska, medical assistants work for regional health corporations, state and federal agencies, or community-based health care programs.

### **What else is on this pathway?**

Want to learn about other possible opportunities in the clinical services career pathway? Be sure to read about pharmacy technicians and pharmacists – other clinical services "hot jobs" in Alaska!





## get on the clinical services path

### Is this the job for me?

Take this quick quiz to find out if pharmacy technician is a good direction for you:

- 1 Are you interested in working with medications?  
 YES  NO
- 2 Are you detail-oriented and very exact in your work?  
 YES  NO
- 3 Are you good with people?  
 YES  NO
- 4 Do you mind repeating the same tasks over and over again?  
 YES  NO
- 5 Do you enjoy math and science?  
 YES  NO
- 6 Can you handle stressful situations?  
 YES  NO
- 7 Do you want to get into a career in one to two years?  
 YES  NO

If you answered yes to several of these questions, you may be on the right track!

### What's it all about?

Pharmacy technicians help pharmacists prepare and fill prescriptions, and provide information and other health care products to patients. Due to the nature of their job, pharmacy technicians must be very exact and careful in their work. Pharmacy technicians work under the supervision of a licensed pharmacist, and are often employed in drug stores, hospitals, clinics and drug companies.

### What do pharmacy technicians do?

The responsibilities of a pharmacy technician differ depending on where they work. For example, in a drug store, a pharmacy technician may operate a cash register, while in a hospital, they may deliver medication to patients' rooms. The following list outlines the common duties of a pharmacy technician:

- Review and verify prescriptions or requests for refills.
- Maintain proper storage and security for drugs.
- Fill bottles with prescribed medications. Prepare and attach labels to containers.
- Monitor machines that fill prescriptions.
- Count, measure or mix medications.
- Check for authenticity, accuracy and completeness of prescriptions.
- Price and file prescriptions that have been filled.
- Review patient records to determine possible drug interactions.

- Run cash register.
- Prepare insurance claim forms.
- Answer telephones and respond to customer questions.
- Clean and sterilize pharmacy equipment.
- Create and update patient profiles.
- Calculate charges for medication and equipment.
- Deliver medications and supplies to patients or staff.
- Count inventory and enter data into computer.
- Receive and store incoming supplies.
- Sell other health care products and services.

### How much money can I make?

In Alaska, pharmacy technicians earn an average hourly wage of \$16.23, and have an average annual salary of \$33,760.

### How do I become a pharmacy technician? How long does it take?

To become a pharmacy technician, you must:

- Have a high school diploma or GED.
- Be at least 18 years of age.
- Complete on-the-job training or a formal training program.

- Be fluent in reading, writing and speaking English.
- Have an active Alaska State Pharmacy Technician License.
- May become nationally certified.

Employers often prefer applicants who have completed formal training. Formal pharmacy technician programs offer either certificates or associate's degrees. Certificates usually take one year of full-time study, and associate's degrees typically take two years.

While not required, pharmacy technicians may also earn national certification by taking an exam.

Learn more about pharmacy technician programs in Alaska by reviewing the "training providers" section later in this publication.

### Attention high school students!

Think you want to become a pharmacy technician? Well, the time to start planning is now. In general, you should take four years of English, three years of math, three years of social studies, two years of science and possibly two years of a second language. Other recommended classes and electives include:

- Health education
- Introduction to health care
- Community health
- Safety and first aid
- Health care occupations
- Chemistry
- Anatomy and physiology
- Probability and statistics
- Consumer law
- Computer applications
- Keyboarding

You should also discuss your plans with a teacher, counselor or parent, and check to see what work-based learning opportunities, such as field trips, job shadowing and internships, are available in your community.

### Are there jobs available?

There are currently about 17 job openings a year for pharmacy technicians in Alaska, and this occupation is expected to continue to grow quickly (26 percent growth compared to 14.8 percent for all occupations).

### Where are the jobs?

Pharmacy technicians work wherever pharmacists are employed. About half of all pharmacy technicians work in retail drug stores, while others work in hospitals, clinics, nursing homes and research laboratories.

### What else is on this pathway?

Want to learn about other possible opportunities in the clinical services career pathway? Be sure to read about medical assistants and pharmacists – other clinical services "hot jobs" in Alaska!





## get on the clinical services path

### Is this the job for me?

Take this quick quiz to find out if pharmacist is a good direction for you:

- 1 Do you want an in-depth understanding of what medications are and how they affect the body?  
 YES    NO
- 2 Are you very exact and detailed?  
 YES    NO
- 3 Do you enjoy talking and explaining things to people?  
 YES    NO
- 4 Are you strong in math and science?  
 YES    NO
- 5 Do you like practical, hands-on work?  
 YES    NO
- 6 Do you want a job where you train and supervise others?  
 YES    NO
- 7 Are you willing to invest six or more years in your education?  
 YES    NO

If you answered yes to several of these questions, you may be on the right track!

### What's it all about?

Pharmacists are specialists in the science and use of medications. They have the very important job of preparing and dispensing medications that are prescribed by doctors and other health care workers. In addition to dispensing drugs, pharmacists also make sure prescribed medications will not interact with other drugs the patient may be taking, and ensures that the medication and dosage are appropriate. Pharmacists also educate patients about the medication they are taking.

Pharmacists work in hospitals, nursing homes and retail drug stores. Some pharmacists specialize in areas such as community health, home health, hospital medicine, nuclear pharmacy, quality control or research.

### What do pharmacists do?

Common responsibilities of a pharmacist include:

- Dispense drugs prescribed by doctors and health care workers.
- Review prescriptions for accuracy before dispensing.
- Ask patients about symptoms and current medicines they are taking.
- Instruct patients on how to store and use various medicines.
- Provide information to patients about dosage, side effects and drug interactions.
- Analyze patient records to prevent overuse or interactions.
- Determine the strength, type and purity of medications.

- Prepare sterile equipment for use by doctors and patients.
- Order drugs and other medical supplies.
- Monitor the security of controlled substances and the disposal of hazardous waste.
- Maintain records, such as pharmacy inventory and patient profiles.
- Hire, train and supervise employees and interns.
- Review, monitor and evaluate drug therapies for patients.
- Provide services to help patients manage special health conditions.
- Answer questions and make recommendations to customers about over-the-counter drugs and medical supplies.
- Advise health care providers on selection and effects of drugs.
- Provide information and activities that promote health.
- Refer patients to other health care resources or providers.
- May compound (mix) medications using standard formulas and processes.

### How much money can I make?

In Alaska, pharmacists earn an average hourly wage of \$50.77, and have an average annual salary of \$105,610.

### How do I become a pharmacist? How long does it take?

To become a pharmacist, you must:

- Have a high school diploma or GED.
- Be fluent in reading, writing and speaking English.
- Complete at least two years of accredited college work prior to entering pharmacy school.
- Graduate from a four-year pharmacy school with a doctor of pharmacy (PharmD) degree.
- May need to complete a residency after graduation.
- Complete a 1,500-hour internship under the direct supervision of a licensed pharmacist.
- Pass the North American Pharmacist Licensure Exam (NAPLEX) and Multistate Pharmacy Jurisprudence Exam (MPJE).
- Obtain an Alaska pharmacist license.
- Complete 30 hours of continuing education every two years.

After high school, it takes approximately six years of education to become a pharmacist, including two years of college-level, pre-pharmacy courses and four years of pharmacy school. Some pharmacists choose to pursue advanced degrees, such as master's degrees or doctorates.

While there are currently no pharmacy programs in Alaska, planning has begun to bring and host programs in the state. A pre-pharmacy program is also under development. Learn more by reviewing the "training providers" section later in this publication.

### Attention high school students!

Think you want to become a pharmacist? Well, the time to start planning is now. In general, you should take four years of English, three years of math, three years of social studies, two years of science and possibly two years of a second language. You should also consider taking college-preparatory and advanced placement (AP) classes. Other recommended classes and electives include:

- Anatomy and physiology
- Health education
- Introduction to health care
- Health care occupations
- Trigonometry
- Physics
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Computer applications
- Keyboarding

You should also discuss your plans with a teacher, counselor or parent, and check to see what work-based learning opportunities, such as field trips, job shadowing and internships, are available in your community.

### Are there jobs available?

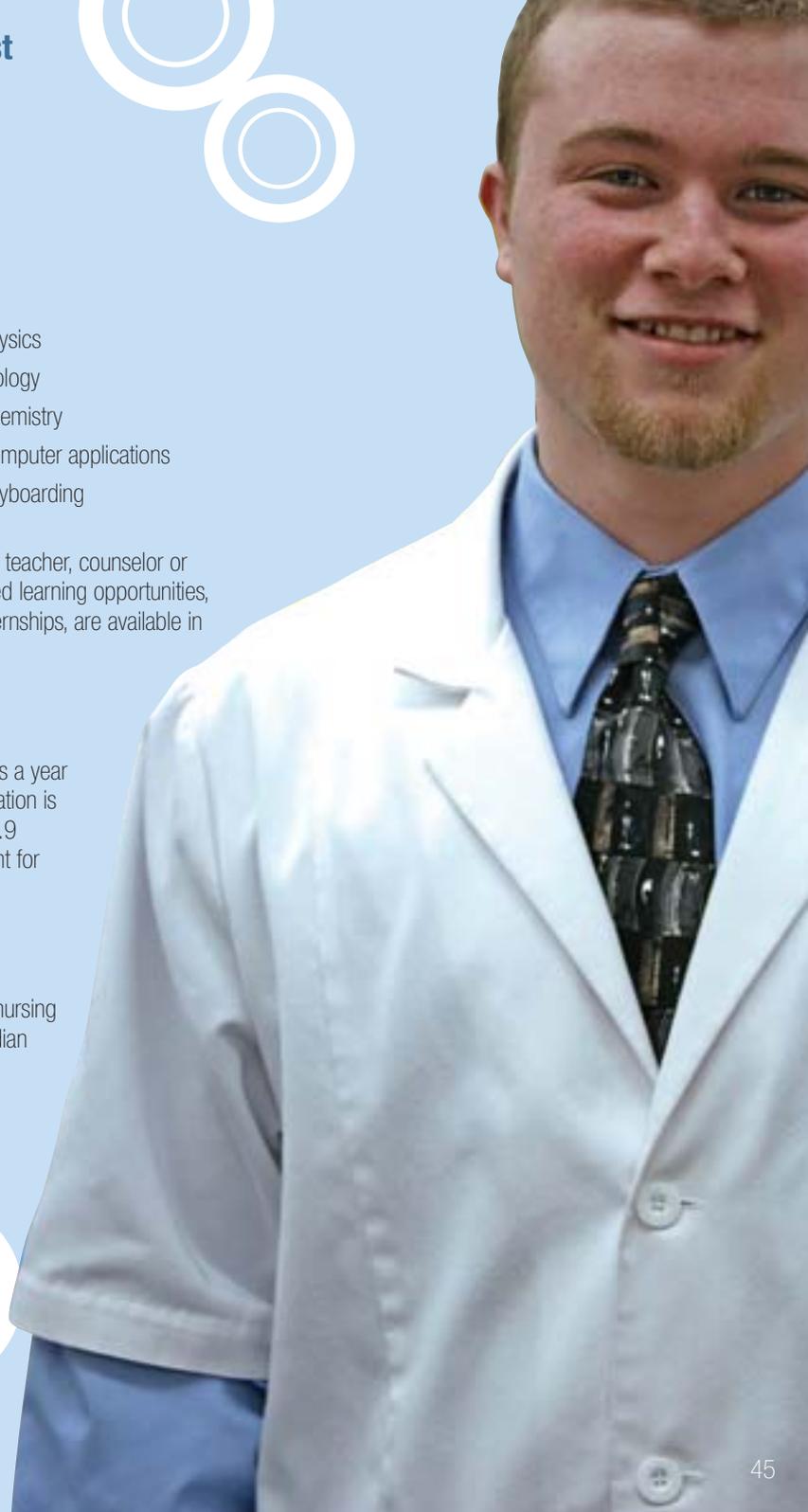
There are currently about 16 job openings a year for pharmacists in Alaska, and this occupation is expected to continue to grow quickly (25.9 percent growth compared to 14.8 percent for all occupations).

### Where are the jobs?

In Alaska, pharmacists work in hospitals, nursing homes, retail drug stores, and with the Indian Health Service.

### What else is on this pathway?

Want to learn about other possible opportunities in the clinical services career pathway? Be sure to read about medical assistants and pharmacy technicians – other clinical services "hot jobs" in Alaska!





## get on the administrative services path

### Is this the job for me?

Take this quick quiz to find out if coding/billing specialist is a good direction for you:

- 1 Are you interested in health care, but don't want to perform patient care?  
 YES  NO
- 2 Are you organized and good at looking things up quickly?  
 YES  NO
- 3 Do you like working with numbers?  
 YES  NO
- 4 Are you careful, detailed and accurate?  
 YES  NO
- 5 Do you have excellent communication skills?  
 YES  NO
- 6 Are you good with computers?  
 YES  NO
- 7 Do you want to get into a career in two years or less?  
 YES  NO

If you answered yes to several of these questions, you may be on the right track!

### What's it all about?

Coding/billing specialists, who work in doctors' offices, hospitals and other medical facilities, specialize in coding patient information for billing and research purposes. Using standard coding systems, coding/billing specialists review patients' records and assign codes for each diagnosis and procedure. They then report this information to insurance companies or other third-party payors, so the medical provider can be reimbursed for expenses. Coded information may also be used by researchers and public health officials.

In addition to being organized and having good computer skills, coding/billing specialists must also have a solid background in medical terminology, disease processes, pharmacology, anatomy and physiology, and patient privacy laws.

### What do coding/billing specialists do?

Tasks commonly performed by coding/billing specialists include:

- Review and analyze patients' medical records.
- Assign numeric or alphanumeric codes for each diagnosis and procedure, using standard coding systems.
- Code and enter data on insurance forms.
- Calculate how much patients owe.
- Bill insurance companies and prepare patients' invoices.
- Operate computers and use software to post totals, transcribe data

and encode documents.

- Update records when payments are received.
- Sort items for processing or collection.
- Talk with patients to obtain or give account information.
- Answer questions about rates and procedures.
- Resolve billing errors.
- Keep files secure and confidential.

### How much money can I make?

Alaska-specific wage information on medical coding/billing specialists is not available. However, general billing and posting clerks in Alaska earn an average hourly wage of \$16.50, and have an average annual salary of \$34,320.

### How do I become a coding/billing specialist? How long does it take?

To become a coding/billing specialist, you must:

- Have a high school diploma or GED.
- Complete coding/billing courses, receive on-the-job training or obtain a certificate.
- May earn national certification.

While a formal training program is not required for this position, there are a number of courses and certificate programs that prepare students to work as coding/billing specialists. Most certificate programs take two years or less to complete.

Coding/billing specialists may also become certified. Due to the constant changes in medical office technology, it is also important for coding/billing specialists to take classes to keep their skills up-to-date.

Learn more about coding/billing specialist programs in Alaska by reviewing the “training providers” section later in this publication.

### Attention high school students!

Think you want to become a coding/billing specialist? Well, the time to start planning is now. Review this list of recommended courses to take in high school, then discuss your plans with your parents or school counselor.

- Office procedures
- Keyboarding
- Business and applied English
- Health education
- Medical terminology
- Anatomy and physiology
- Biology
- Business math

Also, check with a teacher or counselor to see what work-based learning opportunities, such as field trips, job shadowing and internships, are available in your community.

### Are there jobs available?

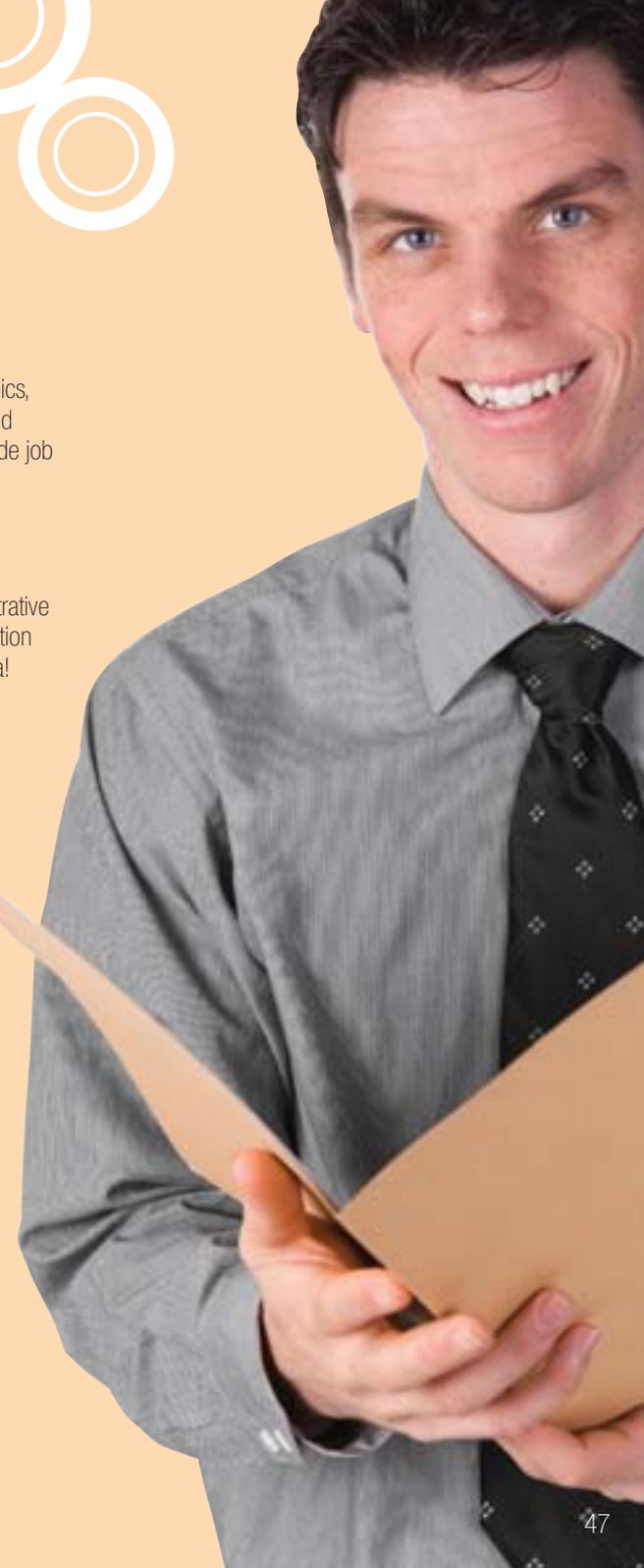
While the specific number of job openings for coding/billing specialists in Alaska is not available, this occupation has been identified as a high-demand job in the state.

### Where are the jobs?

Coding/billing specialists can be found in hospitals, medical clinics, doctors' offices, veterinary hospitals, long-term care facilities and behavioral health facilities. Native health corporations also provide job opportunities.

### What else is on this pathway?

Want to learn about other possible opportunities in the administrative services career pathway? Be sure to read about health information technicians – another administrative services “hot job” in Alaska!



# HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNICIAN



## get on the administrative services path

### Is this the job for me?

Take this quick quiz to find out if health information technician is a good direction for you:

- 1 Are you interested in health care, but don't want to provide patient care?  
 YES  NO
- 2 Do you enjoy math, science, management, law and computers?  
 YES  NO
- 3 Do you like to organize and arrange things and information?  
 YES  NO
- 4 Do you like to work independently, with others or some of both?  
 YES  NO
- 5 Do you enjoy handling numbers?  
 YES  NO
- 6 Are you detail-oriented?  
 YES  NO
- 7 Do you want to get into a career in about two years?  
 YES  NO

If you answered yes to several of these questions, you may be on the right track!

### What's it all about?

Health information technicians, also called medical records technicians, are responsible for gathering, organizing and updating patients' medical records. This is a very important job, as physicians and other health care workers rely on these records, which include comprehensive information on patients' symptoms, medical history, test results, X-rays, diagnoses and treatment plans.

### What do health information technicians do?

Common tasks performed by a health information technician include:

- Collect, code and maintain patients' medical records.
- Process patient admission and discharge forms.
- Make sure records are complete and accurate.
- Develop organized filing and storage systems.
- Keep files secure and confidential.
- Talk to physicians and other health care workers to gather missing information about patients.
- Enter patient information, such as diagnoses and treatments, into computers.
- Assign codes to each diagnosis and procedure, using standard coding systems.
- Compile and maintain special records, called registries, on patients who have certain health problems, such as cancer. Analyze data to

provide research information.

- Assemble and analyze patient data to help improve patient care or control costs.
- Prepare medical records for release to authorized parties, such as insurance companies or lawyers.
- May specialize in coding diagnoses and procedures.
- May supervise and train other medical records staff.
- May bill insurance companies and prepare patients' invoices.
- May perform medical transcription.

### How much money can I make?

In Alaska, health information technicians earn an average hourly wage of \$15.28, and have an average annual salary of \$31,780.

### How do I become a health information technician? How long does it take?

To become a health information technician, you must:

- Have a high school diploma or GED.
- Graduate from a health information technology program.
- May become certified.

Most health information technology programs offer associate's degrees, which take about two years to complete. Some health

information technicians go on to earn bachelor's degrees, which prepares them to work as managers or administrators. This degree takes about four years.

After completing an accredited program, graduates are eligible to earn their Registered Health Information Technician (RHIT) credential by passing a national exam. Technicians with the RHIT credential are required to complete 20 hours of continuing education every two years.

Learn more about health information technician programs in Alaska by reviewing the "training providers" section later in this publication.

### Attention high school students!

Think you want to become a health information technician? Well, the time to start planning is now. In general, you should take four years of English, three years of math, three years of social studies, two years of science and possibly two years of a second language. You should also consider taking college-preparatory and advanced placement (AP) classes. Other recommended classes and electives include:

- Anatomy and physiology
- Introduction to health care
- Medical office
- Medical terminology
- Keyboarding
- Computer applications
- Probability and statistics

You should also discuss your plans with a teacher, counselor or parent, and check to see what work-based learning opportunities, such as field trips, job shadowing and internships, are available in your community.

### Are there jobs available?

Nationwide, the health information technician occupation is expected to grow twice as fast as all other occupations (28.9 percent growth for this job compared to 13 percent for all occupations). Health information technician has also been identified as a high-demand job in Alaska.

### Where are the jobs?

Approximately one-third of all health information technicians work in hospitals. Jobs are also available in clinics, doctors' offices, nursing homes and outpatient care centers.

### What else is on this pathway?

Want to learn about other possible opportunities in the administrative services career pathway? Be sure to read about coding/billing specialists – another administrative services "hot job" in Alaska!

