

Assessment of Immunization Training Needs for Medical Assistants

Project Abstract

Background: Medical assisting is one of the nation's fastest growing careers, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Medical assistants' duties vary but may include preparing and administering immunizations. The purpose of the Assessment of Immunization Training Needs for Medical Assistants survey was to assess the immunization-related training needs of medical assistants (MAs) throughout the U.S.

Methods: A web-based instrument, with 25 questions, was developed to describe the population of MAs, the immunization services tasks they perform, their experiences with immunization-related training, their future training preferences, and possible means for communicating with them. Even though the survey distribution methodology targeted 24 states (and rural populations within four of these 24-targeted states), the final group of respondents included 1977 MAs from 49 states and the District of Columbia and Guam.

Results: Key findings include: Professional preparation to become a MA was varied and while MAs worked in a variety of settings, most worked in physicians' offices (71%) and of those, family practice offices (41%). Immunization tasks that MAs performed often include: screening patients (74%), educating patients/parents (78%), administering vaccines (81%), record keeping (88%), and storing and handling vaccines (80%). The leading reasons MAs participated in immunization training were when a doctor or other medical staff offered training in their office (26%), when there was a change in immunization recommendations (22%), or when a new vaccine came out (20%). Training topics identified as important to MAs include: adverse reactions or "side effects" (91%), educating patients/parents (89%), administering vaccines (88%), risk communication (88%), record keeping and/or documentation in patient record (87%), immunization schedules (87%), storage and/or handling of vaccines (86%), clinical information about disease (85%), Vaccine Information Statements (84%), and screening patients (82%). MAs' preferred delivery method for future immunization trainings was as an in-service activity in their office and preferred educational strategies include problem-based learning and case studies. Factors that motivated MAs to participate in immunization trainings were learning new or updated information and current job requirements. Barriers for participating in immunization trainings were finding time during their work schedule, not being aware of available trainings and the cost of trainings.

Conclusions and Recommendations: Conclusions and recommendations center around the areas of 1.) advocacy (advocate for professional preparatory standards; partner with medical/nursing associations; advocate for registry to collect contact information), 2.) communications (announce training availability via email, direct mail and key websites; communicate training opportunities with worksite supervisors), and 3.) training (focus trainings on topics identified by MAs; develop case studies and problem-based learning activities; deliver trainings as in-services; explore strategies to offer no-cost or low-cost trainings).