

Date: March 9, 2020

To: Cathy Sandeen, Chancellor

From: John Stalvey, Interim Provost 

Cc: Jeff Jessee, Dean of the College of Health; Vice Provost for Health Programs  
Lisa Nash, Committee Chair & Term Instructor of Medical Assisting  
Cheryl Lippert, Term Assistant Professor of Medical Laboratory Science  
Susan Kalina, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs  
Claudia Lampman, Vice Provost for Student Success

Re: **AY20 Expedited Program Review Findings – Medical Office Coding OEC & Medical Assisting AAS**

I have reviewed the dean's findings and the completed Expedited Program Review Template for the Medical Office Coding OEC and Medical Assisting AAS. The Provost's Office did not receive an Optional Program Response Form from the program.

### **Recommendations**

My recommendation is to accept the decision and recommendations of the dean with the additional commentary that the program should investigate why the OEC has fewer graduates than the AAS, even though the OEC has more students. The program should also explore enhanced partnerships with the school districts. Many of the courses are offered online and the program should explore greater collaboration across the three universities. An interim progress report on all recommendations is due to the dean by March 1, 2021. The dean will submit a review along with the program's interim progress report to the provost by April 1, 2021. Unless otherwise noted at that time, the next Program Review will be included in the regular ongoing program review schedule.

### **Decision**

Recommend Continuation



Date: February 21, 2020

To: John Stalvey, Interim Provost

From: Jeff Jessee, Dean of the College of Health and Vice Provost of Health Programs

Cc: Lisa Nash, Committee Chair & Term Instructor of Medical Assisting  
Cheryl Lippert, Term Assistant Professor of Medical Laboratory Science

Re: AY20 Expedited Program Review Findings

**Program/s in this review:** Medical Office Coding OEC & Medical Assisting AAS

**Specialized accrediting agency (if applicable):** The Certified Medical Assistant examination preparation course of study is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) upon the recommendation of the Medical Assisting Education Review Board (MAERB).

**Campuses where the program is delivered:** Anchorage

**Centrality of Program Mission and Supporting Role:**

The Medical Assisting program at UAA offers an OEC in Medical Office Coding and an AAS in Medical Assisting. Medical office coders work with medical records for statistical and reimbursement purposes. Medical assistants are multi-skilled allied health professionals specifically trained to work in ambulatory settings, such as physicians' offices, clinics and outpatient care centers. They perform administrative and clinical procedures. Upon successful completion of the Medical Office Coding OEC, students are able to sit for Certified Professional Coder examination from the American Academy of Professional Coders. Graduates of the Medical Assisting AAS are able to sit for the national Certified Medical Assisting examination offered by the American Association of Medical Assistants. The demand for medical assistants in Alaska is robust. Employment is expected to grow by 23.4%, and the average number of annual openings is very high (+235). There is also strong demand for medical office coders. These programs provide essential healthcare support services. They are central to the College of Health mission to advance the health and wellbeing of people and communities.

**Program Demand (including service to other programs), Efficiency, and Productivity:**

During the review period, an average of 10.1 students per year obtained a Medical Office Coding OEC, and an average of 19.3 obtained a Medical Assisting AAS (for a total of 29.4 students per year). The number of majors has been stable. On average, there were 29.4 majors in the Medical Office Coding OEC each year, and another 24.6 in the Medical Assisting AAS (for a total of 54 students per year). The programs are structured and offered efficiently. Three of the four courses for the Medical Office Coding OEC are required for the Medical Assisting AAS. The Medical Office Coding OEC is offered in partnership with the University of Alaska Fairbanks and Kodiak College. Medical Assisting courses are often taken by non-

majors (72% of the student credit hour production came from non-majors). This generated significant tuition revenue. On average, the full tuition revenue exceeded the instructional costs for the programs by 10%.

**Program Quality, Improvement and Student Success:**

The Medical Office Coding OEC and Medical Assisting AAS do not have specialized accreditations, but the Certified Medical Assistant examination preparation course of study is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) upon the recommendation of the Medical Assisting Education Review Board (MAERB). The Certified Medical Assisting examination is only available to students who have completed an accredited course of study. Academic assessments show that students and employers are both very satisfied with the programs. Students perform very well on the national certification exams. As part of the program's continuous improvement process, curriculum documents and program student learning outcomes should be updated.

**Program Duplication / Distinctiveness:**

All three universities within the University of Alaska system offer medical assisting programs. The programs are separately accredited, and the three universities serve different student populations. Given that 235 job openings are expected each year, it is clear that all three programs are needed at this time. Nonetheless, a greater degree of collaboration across programs could reduce costs and facilitate student success.

**Commendations and Recommendations:**

The Medical Assisting programs are essential because they provide the postsecondary training that is required to provide healthcare support services as medical office coders and medical assistants. Program quality is high, and students are successful. The programs should clearly be continued. As the programs continue, the curriculum needs to be updated. The College of Health supports the program's desire to partner with other MAUs and community campuses in making these updates and revisions in a manner that is consistent with each program's specialized accreditation. While the need for medical assistants is strong enough to support three different programs, partnerships across programs could create efficiencies and greater opportunities for students.

**Decision:**

Continuation.

**Submission date:** February 11, 2020

**Program/s in this review:** Medical Assisting, AAS, Medical Office Coding OEC

**Specialized accrediting agency (if applicable):** Medical Assisting Education Review Board (MAERB)

**Campuses where the program is delivered:** Anchorage

**Members of the program review committee:**

- Lisa Ann Nash, Interim Program Director, Assistant Professor, MA (Chair), Anchorage
- Cheryl Lippert, Assistant Professor, MLS, Program Review Committee Member, UAA

**1. Centrality of Program Mission and Supporting Role (700 words or less)**

*Relevancy*

The mission of the UAA Medical Assisting (MA) program is to “provide quality training to individuals desiring to work in the fast-paced, highly technical, ever-changing field of medical assisting.” The program’s mission aligns with that of the School of Allied Health, College of Health and UAA by supporting UAA’s commitment to serving the higher education needs of the state and its communities by providing training in highly technical and skilled medical occupations to meet the healthcare needs of the people of Alaska.

The UAA MA program is the primary educator for Certified Medical Assistants (CMA®), American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA) (recognized internationally), in Southcentral Alaska. Graduates are educated and tested in clinical and administrative responsibilities. The CMA (AAMA) requires graduation from an accredited postsecondary medical assisting program. Only these graduates are eligible to take the CMA (AAMA) Exam. Three pathways exist: certificate-only, AAS-only, or an AAS with passing of core competencies. The majority of students pursue the last.

UAA MA students are highly sought after by clinical practices before they graduate. Many are hired by their externship sites. Weekly requests to host or hire students and graduates are received. Offices report they prefer our graduates because of the extensive clinical education as well as English, writing and communication.

Our MA program offers an Occupational Endorsement Certificate (OEC) in Medical Office Coding. Students that complete the coursework are prepared for the American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC) Certified Professional Coder (CPC) examination. Graduates are extremely employable due to the high demand of certified coders across the country. This OEC does not hold any separate accreditation.

*Support of Other Programs*

The MA program oversees two primary entry-level courses for students interested in healthcare careers: Medical Terminology (MA A101) and Essentials of Human Diseases (MA A104). Pre-majors in nursing, therapies, sonography, surgical technology, and physician assistant engage in interprofessional health team conversations through these courses.

*Partnerships*

The Medical Assisting program hosts an Advisory Committee comprised of students, graduates, MA faculty, sponsor administrators, employers, physicians, and the public. The Board meets annually and provides guidance and direction to meet the needs and expectations of our healthcare community.

The MA program externship sites include: Southcentral Foundation, Providence Family Medicine Center, and various specialty clinics.

The Medical Office Coding OEC is a stand-alone entity. It does not offer coursework required in other UA programs. The OEC program relies on UAA-Kodiak for two essential courses: Coding for the Medical Office (MA A220, 3 credits) and Advanced Case Studies in Medical Coding (MA A320, 2 credits). These courses are offered only in specific semesters: MA A220 in Fall and MA A320 in Spring. Nevertheless, an agreement was reached to teach MA A220 this spring to facilitate the academic progress of several Anchorage-based students.

#### *Workforce Development/Employment Opportunities*

According to the State of Alaska Department of Labor, employment outlook for medical assistants is robust (minimum of 21% growth) with very high employment opportunities. The average monthly wage is \$3,791.

With demand for graduates of both programs, a coordinated statewide marketing effort could help attract more students to help meet workforce demands. The Alaska@Work initiative is a recruitment tool developed by Alaska Public Media and its partners to connect individuals to career opportunities. The targeted careers do not require a traditional four-year degree. The December 13, 2019 broadcast of *Talk of Alaska* spotlighted Alaska's health care workforce shortage and how it threatens the growing industry. The Wrangell Medical Center has recruited members of their community to reduce CNA turnover from outsiders. "Use of Apprenticeship to Meet Demand for Medical Assistants in the U.S." states the use of apprenticeships is a workforce development tool that provides employers with skilled workers trained to the specific needs of the employer. Alaska currently has a program run through Alaska Primary Care Associates. Is there an opportunity to partner?

#### *Extramural Support*

Strong support for the MA program is evident within the healthcare community at large through the hosting of our students during externship. This in-kind support of 240 hours of real-life, hands-on, supervised patient experiences is invaluable, required by accreditation, and provides a pipeline of placement for our students. In addition, the program is fortunate to receive donated equipment and supplies from the community.

## **2. Program Demand (including service to other programs), Efficiency, and Productivity (7 year trend; 1400 words or less)**

IR data indicate the MA program has not met its capacity to graduate 24 students in the AAS CMA (AAMA) certification path for the past two years. Enrollment for the 2019 Admission Cohort is low, as enrollments across the UA system have also decreased.

The enrollment in the Medical Office Coding OEC is declining as well. Although the certificate is available with the support of other UA campuses, this knowledge is not fully known or communicated. In fact, a request from outside the program was made in January 2019 to suspend admissions to the program. Fortunately, this request was denied, as this program meets a critical need that supports the healthcare industry.

Lower class size does not mean lower employment opportunities. The Program Director receives at least one call every week looking for CMA (AAMA). Employment opportunities remain high for CMAs and coders/billers. The challenge is to market the programs to recruit students to fill available space.

Credits and years per degree seem high for an OEC and AAS. Many students have prior coursework before entering our programs which gives an inaccurate appearance of time or credits required for the degree. Student advising for prerequisite courses required for the program has been weak, however, and has resulted in some additional time and credits towards the award. Courses are scheduled for efficient completion of each program and student advising on appropriate course selection has been improved to reduce excess time and credits.

Tuition revenue from the Medical Assisting courses continue to wholly support the Program expenses including full-time faculty, Program Director, and (Clinical) Practicum Coordinator, and any adjunct faculty. The Program has reallocated faculty resources to meet the demands of the Program.

### 3. Program Quality, Improvement and Student Success (1500 words or less)

#### *Specialized Accreditation*

The UAA Medical Assisting program is accredited by CAAHEP (Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs) and reviewed by MAERB (Medical Assisting Education Review Board). The next site visit is scheduled for in 2024.

#### *Curriculum and Distance Offerings*

MAERB periodically reviews the Standards and curriculum for Medical Assisting programs and makes curriculum recommendations to CAAHEP. As an accredited program, we are required to follow the core curriculum and to document the demonstration of affective, cognitive, and psychomotor competencies. However, program faculty incorporate additional topics such as implicit bias, trauma informed care, clinical incidence reporting, and interprofessional simulations. The MA Program recognizes that it needs to formally update its institutional curriculum documents.

There is value to increasing core curriculum class offerings via a quality hybrid or online delivery modality. MA A235 Medical Insurance, Billing and Healthcare Documentation, an online asynchronous course offered through Blackboard, is being redesigned to meet Quality Matters metrics for the Spring 2020. This course also provides opportunities for students to interact in real time at least a few times during the semester.

MA A101 Medical Terminology is being updated with new textbooks and a substantial online presence to include voice recognition software to enhance students' correct pronunciation of medical terms and conditions. MA A104 Essentials of Human Disease is also getting a new textbook with an extensive online resource for students, including pre-recorded lectures. These changes were made to provide a consistent experience for all students regardless of the faculty (adjunct, term, or tenure-track) overseeing the course. Implicit Bias is being introduced into MA A120 Administrative Procedures, MA A250/A255 Clinical Procedures I & II, and MA A295 Clinical Externship.

To support community wellness across the state, the program should increase the use of distance delivery technology to educate our Alaska residents to address the shortage of skilled healthcare workers. While medical assisting may be considered an "entry-level," profession, it does require a post high school education and a nationally recognized certification.

#### *Program Assessment*

All students (100%) demonstrated competence with entry-level psychomotor, affective, and cognitive curriculum content areas of medical assisting. The program's efforts to provide individualized remediation were effective in promoting student competence in all areas of the curriculum.

Our students are actively sought and welcomed at externship sites across the community. Most are offered positions at their externship sites. Data analysis for the past five years supports assessment findings that our students feel well-prepared to be successful in their role (100% Student Satisfaction), and their employers are also 100% satisfied.

The Medical Assisting program recognizes that benchmarks and program assessments can be improved. The program is hoping to clearly link student performance in outcome achievement to program improvement recommendations in the future.

Program assessment for the OEC in Medical Office Coding was not completed during 2019. The associated Program Student Learning Outcomes have not been reviewed recently and need to be updated.

*Student Success and Accomplishments*

Student success does not just happen. Over the years, program faculty have been intimately involved in academic advising in order to ensure students have the knowledge, skills and confidence to be successful in the field. With the establishment of the new College of Health Student Success Center, pre-majors will receive a letter encouraging them to meet with a College of Health advisor to ensure students create a formal academic plan so they are taking the correct pre-requisites and completing courses in the correct order, thus allowing them to graduate in a timely manner. The program is structured so that students are able to move through the program without the expense and time of taking unnecessary classes, thus allowing them to enter the workforce in a timely manner. The new advising system should reduce student credits and time to completion.

MAERB accredited programs annually submit an Annual Report Form (ARF). This may be a good way to compare Medical Assisting programs across the state. Based on this report, the UAA Program for the past five years has graduated at least 92% of its admitted cohorts and graduates have passed the CMA (AAMA) internationally certifying exam at 100%.

ARF reports from the other MAU are currently not available for review.

**4. Program Duplication / Distinctiveness (300 words or less)**

All three Major Academic Units offer medical assisting programs. All three campus programs are separately accredited through CAAHEP and MAERB.

In Fall 2019, the Program Director initiated conversations with Medical Assisting program directors at both the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) and the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) to explore opportunities to collaborate in course offerings to maximize limited faculty resources. Preliminary discussions reveal the three campus' serve distinct student populations. Course sharing currently occurs on a limited basis. Recently UAA automated the transfer of credits for students taking UAF's Essentials of Human Disease.

**5. Summary Analysis (500 words or less)**

The Expedited Program Review Committee recommends *revision* of the UAA Medical Assisting Program to merge the UAA Medical Assisting program into one statewide AAS Medical Assisting program with the OEC-in Medical Office Coding Program housed within it.

Thoughtful, careful, and respectful consideration should be used to complete the following steps:

1. Use the existing academic pathway to graduation (AAS, OEC) that is consistent across all the MAUs.
  - Some academic courses are dictated by MAERB/CAAHEP accreditation and competencies and will be straight forward.
    - i. For example, there is a series of core curriculum (MA A120 Administrative Office Procedures; MA A250 Clinical Procedures I; MA A255 Clinical Procedures II; MA A295 Externship) that is mandated by accreditation.
    - ii. Course sequencing could be evaluated and aligned.
  - This would simplify Student Success / Academic Advising, petitions and transfers across institutions.
2. Map the MAERB Core Competencies to the same courses across all three institutions to facilitate course alignment.

3. Develop a list of recommended program electives that are pertinent to a career in healthcare that can be aligned across institutions.
4. Review courses as represented in Blackboard based on unbiased, evidence-based metrics such as Quality Matters (QM). All MA courses would have a consistent look and feel, allowing students seamless experiences across all courses regardless of location of course delivery.
5. Standardize the textbook(s) for the courses with the imbedded MAERB core competencies. Currently all three campuses use different publishers.
6. Evaluate impact to community campuses and communicate as early as possible.
  - UAA community campuses Eagle River and Mat-Su routinely offer MA A101 and MA A104.
  - If MAERB Core Competencies are assessed within entry-level courses, MAERB must approve faculty teaching those courses or core competencies should be moved to other MA courses that have MAERB-approved faculty.

Additionally:

- We should maximize use of full-time faculty to teach entry-level courses as needed to meet workload agreements.
- Eagle River and Mat-Su campuses could potentially continue to offer the courses but MA program majors could not take them from unapproved faculty and still meet accreditation requirements. This could cause much confusion that might be addressed through curriculum revision to create non-accredited courses for non-majors.
- Local Program Directors would be responsible for working with their respective community campuses to submit 'workbooks' to MAERB for accreditation approval.

Please note: The Program Review Committee does NOT recommend changing the individual campus MAERB accreditation to a single accreditation under one campus.

The student population for each campus is unique. UAS has created a program where the faculty deliver didactic courses using online methodologies then physically travel to multiple locations to observe and complete the Evaluation of Competencies. The UAF program works across multiple community campuses to offer their Clinical Procedures at the local level. The UAA campus population commutes twice weekly for didactic courses and Evaluation of Competencies in laboratory/clinical courses. The cost savings and simplification for students is in combining program offerings and faculty resources, not in combining accreditations.