Karen Von has wanted to work in the medical field for most of her adult life. She studied very hard in high school and graduated with honors. She volunteered in a local hospital, and then, after working as a server in restaurants for 3 years, she enrolled in medical assistant classes. After her externship, she was asked to continue as a regular employee at a family practice in her area.

Karen strives to perform all her duties professionally and compassionately. She maintains a professional image for patients and co-workers. She had found it difficult to learn to be professional at all times and show compassion to patients through just the classroom experience. However, she knew that these were important aspects of her job, and she was able to gain valuable experience in these areas during her externship. Because this is her first job in the medical field, she wants to make a good impression on her employer and to be a team player.

Throughout most of Karen's training as a medical assistant, her grandmother was confined to a rehabilitation center after a stroke. Although she has progressed well with treatment, Karen is the only relative who lives close to the rehabilitation center, and her family depends on her to check on her grandmother from time to time. Karen enjoys spending time at the center reading to her grandmother, because they are close. Still, Karen realizes that the stroke has caused permanent damage, and her grandmother's health seems to be declining.

While studying this chapter, think about the following questions:

- How do professional medical assistants put aside personal issues and devote themselves to the patients in the office?
- How can Karen meet her familial and work obligations equally well?
- What steps should Karen take to ensure that both her family and her supervisors understand her obligations to the other?
- How can Karen exhibit professional behavior and compassion for patients on a daily basis at the physician's office?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define, spell, and pronounce the terms listed in the vocabulary.
2. Explain the meaning of the word professionalism.
3. Discuss several of the characteristics of professionalism.
4. Explain why confidentiality is so important in the medical profession.
5. Discuss the importance of the medical assistant’s attitude in caring for patients.
6. List some examples of office politics.
7. Identify specific ways teamwork can be promoted in the physician’s office.
8. Discuss the meaning of insubordination and why it is grounds for dismissal.
9. Identify and implement time management principles to maintain efficient office function.
10. Talk about goal setting and how it helps a person achieve career success.
VOCABULARY

classifidences Distinguishing traits, qualities, or properties.
commensurate (ku-men-su-rut) Corresponding in size, amount, extent, or degree; equal in measure.
competent Having adequate or requisite capabilities.
notation (kah-nuh-ta-shun) An implication; something suggested by a word or thing.
credibility The quality or power of inspiring belief.
demeanor (di-me-nur) Behavior toward others; outward manner.
detrimental (de-truh-men-tul) Obviously harmful or damaging.
discretion (dis-kre-shun) The quality of being discrete; having or showing good judgment or conduct, especially in speech.
disseminated (di-se-muh-na-ted) To disburse; to spread around.
drug of choice The drug an abuser uses most frequently to satisfy the craving for a certain feeling; the user’s preferred drug.
initiative Energy or aptitude to cause or facilitate the start of something or to cause something to happen.

What is professional behavior? We tend to hold medical personnel to a higher standard of professionalism than those in most other career fields. The medical assistant who works to improve his or her professional approach in the workplace is an asset to the employer and will quickly be promoted to positions of more responsibility in the healthcare industry.

THE MEANING OF PROFESSIONALISM

Professionalism is defined as having a courteous, conscientious, and generally businesslike manner in the workplace. It is characterized by or conforms to the technical or ethical standards of a certain profession. Conducting oneself in a professional manner is essential for successful medical assistants. The attitude of those in the medical profession generally is more conservative than in other career fields. Patients expect professional behavior and base much of their trust and confidence in those who show this type of demeanor in the physician’s office (Figure 4-1).

WORK ETHICS

Work ethics are sets of values based on the moral virtues of hard work and diligence, involving a whole range of activities, from individual acts to the philosophy of the entire facility. The medical assistant should always display initiative and be reliable. A person who has a good work ethic is one who arrives on time, who is rarely absent, whose work output is commensurate with the pay received, and who uses his or her best abilities. Coworkers become frustrated if another employee consistently arrives late or is absent. This forces the co-workers to take on additional duties and may prevent them from completing their own work. One missing employee can disrupt the entire day, because patients may not be seen at their appointment times because the staff is short-handed. Also, lunch and other breaks may be shortened because the staff cannot process cases as quickly when an employee does not show up.

Most new hires have a probationary period that may last 30 to 90 days. Any absences or tardiness during the probationary period can be grounds to terminate the employee once the probationary period is up or even before that if multiple attendance issues arise. If the medical assistant has an emergency and must be absent or tardy, he or she should make sure to notify the

FIGURE 4-1 The professional medical assistant is an asset to the physician’s office.
supervisor according to office policy. All employees must be on time and in attendance every day in the medical office. Physicians and patients alike expect this reliability. Work ethics also involves other situations. If another employee is seen taking drugs from the supply cabinet or money from the cash box, the act should certainly be reported. However, if the guilty employee is also a close friend of the person who witnesses the act, an ethical dilemma is present. A medical assistant must always act in such a way that his or her actions are above reproach.

**Characteristics of Professionalism**

Many characteristics make up the professionalism required of medical assistants. Student medical assistants should begin developing these characteristics while in school; these qualities do not appear magically when the student begins working with actual patients. Although we might think that we would always behave appropriately during an externship or in a job setting, the habits developed in school will carry over into these experiences. If the behavior is unacceptable, it will be detrimental to the medical assistant’s professional career. If the medical assistant wishes to advance and receive wage increases, promotions, and the trust of the employer, the following characteristics must be a part of his or her persona.

**Critical Thinking Application 4-1**

- How can students practice professional behavior while still in the classroom situation?
- When students are practicing clinical skills, how can they demonstrate proficiency in professional behavior?

**Loyalty**

Loyalty is a faithfulness or allegiance to a cause, ideal, custom, institution, or product. Loyalty to an employer means that the employee is appreciative of the opportunity provided by the job and supports the company by giving the best effort possible. Many individuals today are interested only in what the employer can provide for them. However, this is an immature approach to take toward a job. When a person is employed by a company, use of skills is exchanged for different types of compensation. Each benefits the other. Often we forget that experience alone is a great benefit from working. Loyalty to the employer is important, and the employee should feel a sense of loyalty from the company as well.

**Critical Thinking Application 4-2**

- How can Karen demonstrate loyalty to her employer?
- What are some ways her employer can reciprocate Karen’s loyalty?

**Dependability**

One of the most valuable traits of a successful medical assistant is dependability. The physician and supervisors must know that they can depend on the medical assistant to perform all of the assigned duties each day. A medical assistant must follow through when the physician or supervisor gives an order. Be responsible enough to know the job description and what is expected on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. Supervisors should be confident that once given a task to do, the medical assistant will carry it out accurately and in a timely manner.

**Courtesy**

Show courtesy to the patients and co-workers in the physician’s office. Kind words and compassion go far in building trust between the medical assistant and patients (Figure 4-2). All visitors and staff members in the office should be shown kindness and consideration. The fact that a medical assistant is having a bad day is no excuse for inflicting anger or irritation onto patients. Always demonstrate a good attitude and offer patients and visitors a sincere smile.

**Initiative**

Lack of initiative is one of the more common complaints from supervisors about employees. Taking initiative means that the medical assistant looks for opportunities to be of help, assisting others as the workload demands. Instead of waiting to be told to perform a task, the competent medical assistant looks for jobs that need to be completed; never remain idle. Employees can always find tasks to complete in the medical office. For example, filing is a continual need. Supplies can be inventoried, ordered, or restocked when extra time is available. Cleaning countertops and straightening areas as work is done helps keep the facility tidy. The medical assistant should also keep an eye on the reception area, which may need attention several times during the day.

**Critical Thinking Application 4-3**

- How can Karen show her initiative on the job?
- What types of duties can she perform if she has finished her work for the day and some time is left before she is scheduled to leave?

**Flexibility**

A medical assistant must be able to adapt to a wide variety of situations. An emergency could occur in the office, and the staff must be flexible enough to adjust the schedule and care for all patients. Being flexible also means that staff members are willing to assist
one another in the performance of their duties. No one in the physician's office should ever say, "That's not my job." The patients must come first, and every staff member must be willing to lend a hand where needed. Some medical assistants trade or rotate their duties. If one assistant does not particularly enjoy doing a certain task, perhaps another assistant would be willing to trade tasks. This way, both are more satisfied with their jobs. If the medical assistant is able to adapt to various situations quickly and cheerfully, he or she becomes a valuable asset to the office.

### Credibility

Credibility is the perceived competence or character of a person, leading to the belief that the individual can be trusted. Because trust is a vital component of the physician-patient relationship, the credibility of the physician and those who assist in the office should be strong. The information provided to patients must be accurate. Patients expect that the physician and medical assistant instruct them in a manner that enhances their health and provides positive results. One must take care in giving any advice to patients, because they view the medical assistant as an agent of the physician. Patients may not distinguish between the medical assistant's comments and the physician's orders. Remember that giving anything that could be construed as medical advice is outside the scope of the duties of the medical assistant. To avoid facing charges of practicing medicine without a license, a medical assistant must be sure to suggest only what the physician has authorized.

### Confidentiality

The importance of confidentiality in the medical environment cannot be stressed enough. Patients are entitled to privacy where their health is concerned, and they should be confident that medical professionals use information only to care for them. Never reveal any information about any patient to anyone without specific permission to do so. Always verify that the person seeking information has the right to see it and that the patient has signed a consent form allowing a third party to view the record. Casual conversations in hallways, elevators, and break rooms between staff members can be overheard by a family member or friend of the patient. Confidentiality is often breached in these areas of the medical office.

The rules regarding confidentiality extend beyond the medical office. While at home, medical assistants should not discuss details about patients with their families and friends. Those outside the medical profession do not understand how vital it is to keep information confidential and may pass along private or damaging facts to others. Medical assistants must make it a rule never to discuss a patient with anyone unless information must be shared for patient care and treatment. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) was passed in part to ensure patient confidentiality. (HIPAA is discussed in more detail in later chapters.)

### Attitude

Possibly the most important asset a medical assistant brings to the office is a good attitude. A good attitude is characterized by courtesy and kindness to others, refraining from jumping to conclusions, giving the other person the benefit of the doubt, and being optimistic. This trait alone can influence promotions, terminations, and the entire atmosphere of the office (Figure 4-3). Individuals are able to control their attitudes with practice. It takes skill to react calmly to people who are very upset rather than to respond in kind, especially if you are being harassed or accused. Speaking in an even tone and perhaps a little softer than normal forces the listener to lower his or her voice to hear. Offer to help resolve the problem and attempt to move to a private room to talk, out of the hearing of other patients. Always have a good attitude with co-workers and be willing to assist them with their duties, especially on hectic days.

### OBSTRUCTIONS TO PROFESSIONALISM

At times it is not easy to be a professional. Sometimes patients, co-workers, and supervisors try our patience, and it can be difficult to maintain a professional attitude in these cases. Some of the obstructions to professional behavior are discussed in this section.

### Personal Problems and "Baggage"

Everyone has a life outside the workplace, and sometimes we face challenges and difficult times that are hard to put aside. During working hours, our thoughts should be on the job at hand, especially when we are dealing with patients. However, some situations in our lives may be so critical or distracting that we find ourselves thinking of them constantly. This personal baggage can interfere with our ability to perform job duties properly.

When a situation intrudes on our thoughts at work, it often is best to take the time to talk with a supervisor. It is not always necessary to share the intimate details, but a quick explanation that some difficulties are occurring outside of work helps the supervisor to understand any changes in habit or attitude. Some
supervisors are uncaring and are concerned only with satisfactory job performance. The medical assistant must use some discretion in discussing private affairs with the supervisor.

The professional medical assistant never transfers personal problems or baggage to anyone at the medical facility, especially patients. The workday should be centered around patient care; therefore do not allow personal business to impinge on time that should be spent assisting patients and the physician. The patient must be the prime concern of all the employees in a medical facility.

CRITICAL THINKING APPLICATION 4-4

It often is difficult to keep from thinking about a problem while you are working. How can Karen do this if she is concerned about a grandmother who is critically ill?

Rumors and the “Grapevine”

A rumor is talk or widely disseminated opinion with no discernible source, or a statement that is not known to be true. The definition alone suggests that spreading rumors should be avoided. Most people enjoy working in an environment in which employees cooperate and get along with each other, but rumors can cause problems with employee morale and often are great exaggerations or manipulations of the truth. By promoting the grapevine, rumors are passed along and become more and more outrageous with each retelling. A medical assistant should refuse to participate in the office rumor mill and should attempt to be cordial and friendly to everyone at work (Figure 4-4). Supervisors regard those who spread or discuss rumors as unprofessional and untrustworthy. Avoid passing along work-related rumors to patients, family, and friends.

Personal Phone Calls and Business

The medical assistant should not take unnecessary phone calls from friends and family at the office. The office phone is a business line and must be used as such, except in emergencies. Using personal cell phones during working hours is not acceptable. Use breaks and lunch hours to take care of business on the phone. Never take a personal call or respond to text messages on a cell phone while working with a patient. If a phone must be carried, place it on the vibrate setting and always step into a hall or break area if a call absolutely must be taken. This should happen only in rare cases. Visitors should not frequent the office, especially not in the area where the medical assistant is working. If someone must come to the office, always offer the reception area as a waiting room. Visitors should never be allowed to enter patient areas.

Checking personal e-mail also should be avoided in the workplace. Any type of personal business, such as studying, looking up information on the Internet for personal use, Internet shopping, or balancing a personal checkbook should be done at home and not in the office. All of these actions distract the medical assistant from the job at hand; the focus should be on serving the patients in the office at all times. Many employees are fired each year for surfing or shopping on the Internet for personal reasons or for checking personal e-mail. Make sure all personal business is handled outside of business hours.

CRITICAL THINKING APPLICATION 4-5

- Karen has a friend who works in a video store a few doors down from her office. Her friend has started stopping in daily on her lunch hour to chat with Karen. How can Karen politely discourage this?
- Karen feels the need to check on her grandmother’s condition as often as possible during the day she is ill. How might she accomplish this in a professional way?

Office Politics

Most people associate office politics with some underhanded scheme or plans to move upward in the company in whatever way possible, whether the methods used are ethical or not. The tendency is to give the word politics a negative connotation. Politics can be defined as the art or science of influencing and guiding government or some other organization. The same can be applied to medical office politics. When an individual wishes to move upward in an organization, he or she may use a positive strategy. Many people develop a specific plan regarding how they will advance and in what time period they will accomplish their goals. Medical assistants who want to advance should be productive workers, accept responsibility, be dependable, and always conduct themselves in a professional manner. Using underhanded techniques and instigating trouble is not an effective method of career advancement.

Professional Attributes

Teamwork

If managers were asked to name the most important attributes for medical professionals, teamwork would be high on the list (Figure 4-5). Staff members must work together for the good of the patients. They must be willing to perform duties outside the
formal job description if they are needed in other areas of the office. Many supervisors frown on employees who state, “That’s not in my job description.” Any order that is given by a supervisor becomes mandatory, and an individual who refuses to perform such a task can have his or her employment terminated for insubordination. A medical assistant should perform the duty and later discuss with the supervisor any valid reasons that the task should have been assigned to someone else.

Although we would all enjoy working in an office in which everyone gets along and likes every other employee, this does not always happen. Personal feelings must be set aside at work, and all employees must cooperate with others to get the job done efficiently. If a medical assistant has an issue with another employee, the first move would be to discuss it privately with the other person. If the situation does not improve, perhaps a supervisor should be involved for further discussions.

### Time Management

We have often heard the expression “work smart.” This means that we are to use our time efficiently and concentrate on the most important duties first. To do this, we must first prioritize our duties and arrange our schedules to ensure that these duties can be performed. The first way to improve time management is to plan the tasks that need to be done that day. Taking 10 minutes to write down the tasks for the day helps ensure that they are done. Then, stay on schedule throughout the day, unless you are interrupted by emergencies. Even then, when office days are well planned, allowances can be made for emergencies and most tasks can still be completed. The key to managing time is prioritizing.

### Prioritizing

Prioritizing is simply deciding which tasks are most important. Many people make a “to do” list for the day’s activities, but the secret to success is prioritizing those activities into categories that give order to the tasks.

Most tasks can be prioritized into three general categories: those that must be done that day, those that should be done that day, and those that could be done if time permits. Once a general list of tasks has been established, review the list and further prioritize it, using a code such as M for must, S for should, and C for could (or this might be further simplified by using the letters A, B, and C). Once the tasks have been divided into these categories, they can be further classified within each section. For instance, if category A (must be done that day) has six tasks, they can be numbered in the order they should be performed. The same process is completed with the tasks in categories B and C. As the tasks are completed, they are checked off for that day. Other categories can be added to customize the list. For example, an H category can be used for duties to perform at home, P could represent phone calls that need to be made, E could represent errands to run, and EM might represent e-mails to be sent. Customizing the categories makes the list more user friendly and helps the user to meet his or her individual needs.

### Setting Goals

Individuals who succeed in life are planners and goal setters. The first step in becoming a proficient goal setter is to take the time to really think about what is to be accomplished throughout one’s lifetime. These goals must be written down and reviewed often. Goals should be set for all areas in a person’s life, including personal growth, career, home life, family, spiritual needs, and any other that apply to the individual. The goals should not be unreasonable. They should be measurable and specific, with written steps detailing how they will be achieved. Determination and persistence in reaching the goals helps make them happen, along with hard work. The goals should be reviewed often and progress evaluated. Reset goals whenever necessary and celebrate accomplishments.

### Critical Thinking Application

- What are some goals Karen might set regarding her behavior on the job?
- List several goals for the new medical assistant to work toward during his or her first year in the field.

### Knowing the Facility and Its Employees

A much-circulated story tells of a college professor who used to end a critical test with the question, “What is the name of the woman who cleans our wing of the building?” This would perplex most students, but the question makes a good point. A professional medical assistant should attempt to get to know the people who work in the facility and should have a good idea of who handles which duties (Figure 4–6). When patients have specific problems with which they need help, they can be referred to the person who knows the most about that particular issue. It is wise to express appreciation to others whenever possible. Say “thank you” or “I appreciate your help” often when working with others. This makes co-workers more likely to assist at other times when their help is needed.

### Documentation

From the standpoint of professional behavior, documentation skills are vital to medical assistants. Charting accurately with legible, neat handwriting can make a difference in the perception of professionalism in the medical office. Be complete in any narrative regarding patients. Be sure to state facts, not opinions, and never use sarcastic remarks when charting. Phone messages must be documented carefully as well and handled in a professional
manner. Never use sarcasm when reporting messages to the physician or anyone else in the office. Use conservative speech, proper wording, and good grammar in all situations in the medical facility.

Note Taking

Whenever office meetings or seminars are held, be prepared by having a pad and pencil ready for note taking. A medical assistant should never be without paper and pen so that accurate information from the meeting can be jotted down for future reference. It is wise to keep a notebook or file on office meetings for reference in case clarification of an order or a point is needed. Keep a small spiral notebook in a pocket with a pen, so that if an order is given in passing by the physician, you have a place to jot it down until you have access to the patient's chart. This prevents the administration of incorrect dosages of medication or forgetting to order a laboratory test, as well as many other errors that could be made by relying on memory.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Interpersonal skills are paramount in working with patients and other health professionals. A medical assistant should work to perfect his or her communication techniques. Often the success of a business is directly related to the ability of its employees to communicate effectively.

When speaking to patients and providing them with information, remember that most do not have any medical background and do not understand many of the phrases used by the medical community. A medical assistant must be patient and explain in a courteous manner any aspect of the instructions or details that the patient does not understand. When educating the patient, the medical assistant should have a professional attitude of concern and helpfulness. Assure the patient that medical assistants and the rest of the staff in the facility are bound by rules of patient confidentiality if the patient seems concerned about revealing pertinent information.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

All employees of medical facilities must avoid drug and alcohol abuse (also called substance abuse), which is defined as the repeated and excessive use of a substance, despite its destructive effects, to produce pleasure and escape reality. Substance abuse includes the use of illegal and legal drugs. Many facilities require screening prior to employment, and some perform screenings randomly during employment. Because drugs and alcohol remain in the body for various lengths of time, an individual who uses on a Sunday afternoon may still have residual effects on Monday. This can prevent a medical assistant from performing at maximum capacity and can cause mistakes that may even be life-threatening to the patient. Also, the drive to and from work can result in an accident. Fatal or not, any time that substance abuse results in harm to another person, the user is at risk of lawsuits and legal problems. By abusing drugs even once, the medical assistant can damage his or her career irreparably.

A person is considered to have a substance abuse problem if at least one of the following four criteria is met:
- Continued use despite social or interpersonal problems
- Repeated use that results in failure to fulfill obligations at work, school, and/or home
- Repeated use that results in physically hazardous situations
- Use that results in legal problems

Before a person is labeled an abuser, however, the medical assistant should understand the differences between use, dependence, abuse, and addiction. Most people use some type of drug or supplement, many on a daily basis. If a patient takes a blood pressure medication, he or she uses that drug for a specific purpose that provides a health benefit. Physical dependence is not always part of the definition of addiction. Some drugs cause a physical dependence but not an addiction, such as a medication for diabetes. The patient depends on the drug to relieve the symptoms of the disease, but the drug usually is not abused or used in a way that would be considered an addiction. Abuse is the use of illegal drugs or the misuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs.

Any person who experiences at least three of the following seven criteria in the same 12-month period could be considered an abuser and should seek drug and alcohol counseling:
- Tolerance for the drug
- Withdrawal symptoms
- Difficulty controlling drug use
- Negative consequences from drug use
- Significant time or emotional energy spent seeking drugs
- Neglect of regular activities
- Desire to cut down on the use of a certain drug

Addiction is the compulsive use of a substance despite its negative and sometimes dangerous effects. The abuse of prescription drugs is a growing concern in the United States. Many of these drugs alter brain activity and are highly addictive, and as a result, the user's behavior changes. Opioids, central nervous system depressants, antianxiety drugs, and stimulants are the most common categories of prescription drug abuse. Once users are addicted, their ability to make voluntary decisions changes,
and a craving leads to a state of constantly seeking the drug of choice. Most physicians are opposed to hiring a person with a history of and/or convictions for substance abuse. Often, personal relationships and careers are destroyed, and this can lead to theft to buy drugs or alcohol. (For more information on the most commonly abused drugs and symptoms of substance abuse, visit the Evolve site at evolve.elsevier.com/kimm.)

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), alcohol abuse is a disease that involves the following four symptoms:

- Craving—a strong urge or need to drink
- Loss of control—the inability able to stop drinking once it has begun
- Physical dependence—the occurrence of withdrawal symptoms after drinking (e.g., shakiness, nausea, sweating, and anxiety)
- Tolerance—the need to increase the amount of alcohol taken in to get the same effect

The potential to abuse alcohol is partly inherited, and the individual lifestyle may also influence whether a person becomes an alcoholic. This does not mean that a person who is a child of an alcoholic will definitely become an alcoholic, but the risk is greater when alcoholism is prevalent in the family. Treatment for alcoholism works for many people. Some never drink again, but others may go for months or years without drinking and still suffer a relapse; still others are simply unable to stop drinking for any length of time.

In the physician's office, one question opens the door to talk about alcoholism and helps to diagnose patients, including employees, with alcohol problems. That question is: "On any single occasion in the past 3 months, have you had more than five drinks containing alcohol?" A positive answer should lead to more questions about the individual's drinking habits. Detecting abuse issues early leads to the initiation of treatment, and this can help a person avoid becoming an alcoholic. The earlier in life abuse issues are identified, the more likely it is that treatment will be effective and further abuse will be prevented.

### Patient Education

When speaking to patients and providing them with information, remember that most do not have any medical background and do not understand many of the phrases used by the medical community. A medical assistant must be patient and courteously explain any aspect of the instructions or details the patient does not understand. When educating the patient, the medical assistant should have a professional attitude of concern and helpfulness. Assure the patient that medical assistants and the rest of the staff in the facility are bound by rules of patient confidentiality if the patient seems concerned about revealing pertinent information.

Never transfer personal problems and baggage to the patient. A professional medical assistant does not share personal information with anyone at the medical facility. Refrain from passing along rumors of any type to patients or their families. The workday should be centered around patient care, therefore never allow personal business to intrude on time that should be spent assisting patients and the physician.

### Legal and Ethical Issues

Confidentiality is perhaps the most important aspect of professionalism. Release of any information about patients without their permission is not only unethical, it is against the law. The American Medical Association (AMA) suggests that the purpose of a physician's ethical duty to maintain patient confidentiality is to allow the patient to feel free to make a full and frank disclosure of information to the physician knowing that the physician will protect the confidential nature of the information. Patients must feel that their confidences will be protected by each member of the physician's staff, including the medical assistant.

### Closing Comments

Patients expect and deserve professional behavior from those who work in medical facilities. Always show compassion, caring, and consideration for a person who comes to the office, whether a patient, visitor, or co-worker. By displaying these traits, the medical assistant earns the respect of co-workers and becomes indispensable to the physician-employer. Behaving in a professional manner in the medical office helps gain the patient's trust. Trust is one of the most important factors in preventing cases of medical professional liability. Treating patients with care and not subjecting them to poor attitudes and unnecessary information keeps the patient-physician relationship strong and conducive to the health and recovery of the patient.

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**SUMMARY OF SCENARIO**

Karen is happy to be employed in a family practice in which providing quality patient care is paramount. She is learning to be careful of what she says and to remain focused on the patient instead of any difficulties she may be having. Karen knows it is her responsibility to be a team player and to assist the other staff members as much as possible. She maintains a good attitude, even when personal issues could distract her from her duties. Karen gets a strong sense of pride from being a member of the medical profession. She insists on a neat appearance and arrives on time for each workday. She always asks others if they need help when she has any extra time throughout the day. Karen looks forward to a long relationship with her employer. The rewards she feels as a member of the health team are second to none.

Although Karen is concerned about her grandmother's health, those concerns must be minimally intrusive on her work duties and her attitude toward her patients and co-workers. By making an appointment to speak with her supervisor and explaining the situation with her grandmother, Karen takes a proactive role in ensuring that the supervisor understands the pressures Karen is facing. Most supervisors are sympathetic and understanding when issues outside the practice affect employees; however, this should not happen on a regular basis.
SUMMARY OF SCENARIO—cont’d
By encouraging Karen to call and check on her grandmother periodically, the supervisor helps Karen to feel more confident and less distracted during the day. By finding her supervisor a supportive ally, Karen can relax and carry out her duties professionally and competently throughout the workday. Karen puts the patients first, and this is a fine example of both professionalism and patient compassion.

SUMMARY OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define, spell, and pronounce the terms listed in the vocabulary. Spelling and pronouncing medical terms correctly bolster the medical assistant’s credibility. Knowing the definition of these terms promotes confidence in communication with patients and co-workers.

2. Explain the meaning of the word professionalism. Professionalism is the characteristic of being or of conforming to the technical or ethical standards of a profession. It involves showing courtesy, being conscientious, and conducting oneself in a businesslike manner at the workplace. Professionalism is vital in the health care industry.

3. Discuss several of the characteristics of professionalism. Some of the characteristics of professionalism are loyalty, dependability, courtesy, initiative, flexibility, credibility, confidentiality, and a good attitude.

4. Explain why confidentiality is so important in the medical profession. Confidentiality is crucial in the medical profession, because patients depend on medical personnel to keep their health information private. Breach of patient confidentiality is one reason an employee could be terminated immediately and can result in litigation between the patient and the physician-employer.

5. Discuss the importance of the medical assistant’s attitude in caring for patients. Because most patients are not at their best when visiting the physician’s office, the attitude of the staff plays an important role in patients’ attitudes while in the office. Medical assistants need patience when working with those who are ill. A smile or a reassuring pat on the back goes a long way and can be encouraging.

6. List some examples of office politics. Office politics can be negative or positive. A person who uses others to gain promotion in the company or who takes credit for a team effort may be using office politics in a negative way; a person who strategically plans advancement through outstanding performance, dependability, and teamwork uses office politics in a positive manner. Knowing when to speak and when to listen helps the medical assistant play the game of politics well in the medical facility.

7. Identify specific ways teamwork can be promoted in the physician’s office. Teamwork makes any job easier to complete. By helping those who may be overwhelmed with duties, the medical assistant may find willing co-workers who will help when the situation is reversed in the future. If two assistants both have duties they dislike, they might trade the duties, to the satisfaction of both. All must work together for the good of the facility and the patients it serves.

8. Discuss the meaning of insubordination and why it is grounds for dismissal. Insubordination is disobedience to any type of authority figure, usually the supervisor, and it can be grounds for immediate dismissal. When given a task to complete, the medical assistant should carry out the order unless it is unlawful or unethical. If the medical assistant does not carry out an order, the patient’s life may be at risk. If the medical assistant feels that the duty should be performed by someone else or should not be performed for some reason, he or she should consult the supervisor. Discuss the issue and attempt to reach an agreement about the appropriateness of performing the task in the future.

9. Identify and implement time management principles to maintain efficient office function. Prioritizing tasks can help the medical assistant accomplish more tasks. Prioritizing can be used for work, home, and extracurricular activities. Tasks can be identified as those that must, should, or could be done that day. Then, within each of these categories, the tasks can be numbered in the order in which they should be completed. Prioritizing tasks is the most important time management principle.

10. Talk about goal setting and how it helps a person achieve career success. Goals should be written down and reviewed often to check progress. Taking small steps toward goals helps ensure that they eventually are reached. Individuals should set goals in each area of their lives, breaking the tasks down into manageable parts. Goals should not be unreasonable or unattainable, but rather should provide the opportunity for small successes along the way to reaching the ultimate goal.

CONNECTIONS

Study Guide Connection: Go to the Chapter 4 Study Guide. Read and complete the activities.

Evolve Connection: Go to the Chapter 4 link at evolve.elsevier.com/kinn to complete the Chapter Review and Chapter Quiz. Pursue other resources listed for this chapter to increase your knowledge of Professional Behavior in the Workplace.