

HEALTH CARE ASSISTANTS

NOTE: Effective July 1, 2013, the Department of Health will no longer certify Health Care Assistants. Legislation passed in 2012 allows practice by Medical Assistants in Washington, does away with Health Care Assistants, provides for scopes of practice for four types of Medical Assistants and calls for the Department of Health to develop rules regarding the training and credentialing of Medical Assistants. Information will be posted online in the Washington Physicians' Guide to Health Law as soon as possible after the rules are finalized. Until then, information about Medical Assistants can be found at the WSMA website: <http://www.wsma.org/rules-and-other-regulatory-information#asst>.

What is a health care assistant?

A health care assistant is an unlicensed person who assists a licensed health care practitioner, including physicians and nurses,¹ in providing health care to patients.²

How is a health care assistant certified?

Any licensed health care provider or health care facility may certify a person who meets the minimum regulatory requirements³ to be a health care assistant.⁴ Certification forms must be submitted to the Department of Health,⁵ along with a certification fee.⁶ Certification is good for two years.⁷ It is the responsibility of every health care facility or health care provider who certifies health care assistants to submit renewal forms and fees on or before the expiration date of a health care assistant certification.⁸

May a health care assistant do venipuncture?

Depending upon his or her classification, a health care assistant may perform skin tests; subcutaneous, intradermal, intramuscular, and intravenous injections; and minor invasive procedures to withdraw blood.⁹

What medications may a health care assistant administer?

The list of specific medications, diagnostic agents, and vaccines and the route of administration of each that the supervising practitioner has authorized the health care assistant to administer must be submitted to the Department of Health at the time of initial certification and

¹ RCW 18.135.020(4) ("Health care practitioner" is defined in to include physicians and nurses).

² RCW 18.135.020(2).

³ See WAC 246-826-130 to -180 and WAC 246-826-301 for the minimum regulatory requirements for the different health care assistant classifications.

⁴ RCW 18.135.050(1).

⁵ See WAC 246-826-020.

⁶ See WAC 246-826-990(3).

⁷ WAC 246-826-040.

⁸ WAC 246-826-050. See also WAC 246-826-040.

⁹ See WAC 246-826-100.

again with every recertification.¹⁰ The supervising health care practitioner must maintain the list of the specific medications, diagnostic agents, and vaccines and the route of administration of each that the health care assistant is authorized to administer. Both the supervising practitioner and the health care assistant must sign and date this list.¹¹ If any changes occur that alter the list, a new list with the signatures of the supervising practitioner and the health care assistant must be submitted to the Department of Health within 30 days of the change.¹²

What type of supervision of a health care assistant is required?

A health care assistant may only perform duties under the supervision of a health care practitioner who could order the procedure under his or her own license.¹³

The supervising health care practitioner must be physically present and immediately available in the facility during the administration of injections, vaccines, or authorized drugs.¹⁴ The supervising practitioner need not be present during blood withdrawal procedures.¹⁵

May a physician be disciplined for improper supervision of a health care assistant or for violation of certification requirements?

Yes. A physician's failure to properly supervise a health care assistant is grounds for disciplinary action against the physician. See UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT. Violation of certification requirements for health care assistants is also grounds for disciplinary action against the supervising physician.¹⁶

¹⁰ WAC 246-826-080.

¹¹ WAC 246-826-070.

¹² WAC 246-826-080.

¹³ RCW 18.135.060(1)(a). See also WAC 246-826-020, -030.

¹⁴ WAC 246-826-030. See also RCW 18.135.060(1)(b).

¹⁵ WAC 246-826-030.

¹⁶ See RCW 18.135.070.