

Frequently Asked Questions

CMA (AAMA) Known for Answering Patient Calls for Help



By Cathy Cassata

Anita Figueroa, CMA (AAMA), spends her days caring for older adults at a senior independent living facility in Lincolnshire, Illinois. “My mother passed away young at 58 from ovarian cancer,” she says. “When I’m helping the residents, I feel like I’m helping my mother. I have a feeling of gratitude for being here.”

For six years, she has worked in the facility’s medical center running laboratory tests, giving electrocardiograms, providing wound care, and performing other clinical tasks. Her favorite part of the job is connecting with patients. “I walk around and talk with them and try to make them laugh. For example, one lady was eating ice cream while talking with her group of friends and I pretended like I was going to take and eat her ice cream, and they all started cracking up,” says Figueroa.

She takes pride in inspiring and uplift-

ing the residents when they need it most. For all her efforts, some of them jokingly refer to her as Ann Landers—a pen name for an advice column of the *Chicago Sun-Times* that was started by a Chicago-based nurse.

“If they’re down, I talk to them. If the physician tells them they can walk but they don’t believe they can, I encourage them and stand by them as they try,” she says.

Helping the residents helps Figueroa too. Last year while at work, she learned she had myelofibrosis, a type of bone marrow cancer. “When I got the results, I closed the door, and I started crying and thinking ‘I’m going to die,’ ” recalls Figueroa. “I pushed myself to walk around and talk to the residents. They got me laughing and gave me the energy to take this on. They might not know it, but they inspire me.”

Her connection to older adults carries over into her second job as a caregiver. “Many of the residents request me to be their caregiver too, which is touching,” says Figueroa.

She plans to work at the facility and as a caregiver for a few more years until she retires. Figueroa feels that her 36 years of medical assisting experience landed her exactly where she should be. Prior to becoming a medical assistant, when Figueroa was 17 years old, she worked as a certified

nursing assistant for several years. Then she found other work to make ends meet. “When I heard about medical assisting classes, I was so interested. Going to school for this was the best choice,” she says.

After graduating from a medical assisting program in 1988, she landed a job at her externship site. Over the years, she worked for physicians in family practice, ENT, and rheumatology, each sending her to Washington, D.C., for trainings to enhance her skills. She earned various titles—including office manager, wound care technician, allergy technician, Department of Transportation breath alcohol technician, and Department of Transportation urine drug specimen collector—and is certified as a biller and coder.

“My CMA (AAMA) [certification] took me further than I ever expected and allowed me to stand out and accomplish so much,” she says.

Pride in the profession encouraged her to be vice president of the Chicago chapter of the Illinois Society of Medical Assistants. She is currently serving her fourth term.

“Giving back to the profession is rewarding,” says Figueroa. “I hope to encourage others to take advantage of this great career.” ♦