

1 **Scope of Practice for Medical Assistants under Iowa Law**

2 Donald A. Balasa, JD, MBA; CEO and House Legal Counsel; dbalasa@aama-ntl.org

3 American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA)

4 June 2023

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6 Medical assistants continue to be in high demand throughout the United States. Medical assisting
7 scope of practice is determined primarily by state law. This paper will explain the scope of practice
8 for medical assistants under Iowa law.

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10 **Physician delegation**

11 As is the case under the laws of many states, Iowa law does not refer to “medical assistants” by
12 name. Medical assistants are classified as “unlicensed personnel,” “unlicensed assistive personnel,”
13 and similar references under Iowa law. The following excerpts from the Iowa statutes give
14 physicians the authority to delegate to unlicensed allied health professionals such as medical
15 assistants.

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17 Physician assistant statute: *Iowa [Statutory] Code*, 148C.8—Right to delegate: Nothing in this
18 chapter affects or limits a physician’s existing right to delegate various medical tasks to aides,
19 assistants, or others acting under the physician’s supervision or direction, including orthopedic
20 physician assistant technologists. Such aides, assistants, orthopedic physician assistant technologists,
21 and others who perform only those tasks which can be so delegated shall not be required to qualify as
22 physician assistants under this chapter.

23
24 Nursing statute: *Iowa [Statutory] Code*, 152.1, 6—The “practice of nursing” means the practice of a
25 registered nurse, a licensed practical nurse, or an advanced registered nurse practitioner. It does not
26 mean any of the following:

27

28 c. The performance of services by unlicensed workers employed in offices, hospitals, or health care
29 facilities, as defined in section 135C.1 [e.g., a residential care facility, a nursing facility, an
30 intermediate care facility for persons with mental illness, or an intermediate care facility for persons
31 with mental retardation], under the supervision of a physician or a nurse licensed under this chapter,
32 or employed in the office of a psychologist, podiatric physician, optometrist, chiropractor, speech
33 pathologist, audiologist, or physical therapist licensed to practice in this state, and when acting while
34 within the scope of the employer’s license.

35
36 **Nurse delegation: Iowa Board of Nursing FAQs**

37 [What can be delegated to unlicensed assistive personnel by the RN and LPN?](#)

38 Answer:

39 Refer to the [Iowa Administrative Code 655, Chapter 6, Section 6.2\(5\)"c"](#), which states that,
40 "Activities and functions which are beyond the scope of practice of the licensed practical nurse may
41 not be delegated to unlicensed assistive personnel."

42

43 When delegating it is always necessary to assess the individual patient, the task, and the individual
44 personnel, to ensure that delegation is a safe plan of care for the patient.

45 Once the decision has been made to delegate a task, there must be adequate education and training,
46 documentation of the competency of the individual, a plan for future evaluation and a written
47 institutional policy for carrying out the procedure.

48 The RN and LPN maintain accountability for the delegation process, which includes: assessment, the
49 decision to delegate, monitoring and evaluation of the nursing care.

50

51 *Because all advanced registered nurse practitioners (ARNPs) are registered nurses (RNs), tasks*
52 *delegable by RNs to medical assistants under Iowa law are delegable by ARNPs to medical*
53 *assistants under Iowa law.*

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55 **Physician assistant delegation**

56 Physician assistant statute: Iowa [Statutory] Code, 148C.4—Services performed by physician
57 assistants:

58 1. A physician assistant may provide any legal medical service for which the physician assistant has
59 been prepared by the physician assistant’s education, training, or experience and is competent to
60 perform.

61

62 *Because delegation by physicians to unlicensed personnel such as medical assistants is a “legal*
63 *medical service” under Iowa law, physician assistants who are competent in such delegation are*
64 *permitted to delegate to medical assistants under Iowa law.*

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66 **Tasks Delegable to Medical Assistants**

67 Which tasks **may be delegated** by physicians to unlicensed individuals such as medical assistants
68 under Iowa law? A legally defensible answer to this question consists of two parts:

- 69 • Medical assistants may be delegated, and may perform, only those tasks for which they are
70 knowledgeable and competent.
- 71 • Medical assistants may be delegated, and may perform, those tasks that are included in the
72 *Core Curriculum* of the CAAHEP *Standards for the Accreditation of Educational Programs*
73 *in Medical Assisting*. The following are the tasks that students must demonstrate proficiency
74 in to graduate from a CAAHEP-accredited medical assisting program:
 - 75 ○ Measuring vital signs
 - 76 ○ Performing electrocardiography
 - 77 ○ Performing venipuncture
 - 78 ○ Performing pulmonary function testing
 - 79 ○ Calculating proper dosages of medication for administration
 - 80 ○ Administering oral and parenteral (excluding IV) medications
 - 81 ○ Obtaining specimens and performing CLIA-waived tests
 - 82 ○ Performing wound care
 - 83 ○ Performing dressing changes

84

85 **Tasks Not Delegable to Medical Assistants**

86 Which tasks **are not delegable** to medical assistants under Iowa law?

- 87 • Under common law principles, it is **not** legally permissible for medical assistants to be
88 delegated, and to perform, any task that requires the exercise of independent clinical
89 judgment or the making of clinical assessments, evaluations, or interpretations.
- 90 • It is **not** legally permissible for medical assistants to be delegated, and to perform, any task
91 reserved exclusively in Iowa law to other health professionals—often licensed health
92 professionals.