



# Inside Medical Assisting



By Lawrence Laganelli

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## **Our Featured Medical Assistant Rebecca Surratt MOA /CMA (AAMA) North Carolina Society of Medical Assistants Secretary**



### **Legacy! Tradition! Spirit!**



In the early 1900s, administrative duties in a medical practice were relatively simple and were carried out by an office secretary or the physician himself.

The first Medical Assistant students were enrolled in The Mandl School for Doctor's Assistants in 1924. However, a nursing shortage during World War II created when nurses left private practices to work in hospitals ultimately led to the creation of the medical assistant field. To fill the void left by departing nurses, doctors began training their office secretaries to perform duties similar to those executed by nurses.

By the 1950's people who were working as medical assistants, realizing how much benefit professional organization had brought to Doctors and Nurses, had begun to organize themselves into groups. The crystallizing moment, in an official sense, came when the Kansas Medical Assistants Society held a meeting in 1955 to set up a national body - the name they chose was the American Association of

Medical Assistants. In 1978, the United States Department of Health Education and Welfare formally recognized the Medical Assistant as an allied health profession.

This new founded profession required devoted people to step forward and pilot the enormous organizational responsibilities from the shores of the Atlantic to the shores of the Pacific.

Committed volunteers were required to maintain and preserve the spirit, legacy and tradition of the Medical Assisting Profession in the United States.

Being a part of this Sister/Brotherhood, a bond arises, among one another of support and comradeship. Devoted relationships, quite different then your everyday work place; being part of a State Society of Medical Assistants is like having a second family.

To quote Rebecca when I asked; in your opinion what are the benefits of the NC society to its members?



“You can get so much from being involved in the NCSMA or any State Society. Personally, being an active member of the NCSMA has brought me to a point in my life that I had never expected to be at. Growing up I was always involved in several clubs and teams and I usually had a leadership role. But even then I was never confident in myself, and even as a leader felt like no one was listening to me. Being in the NCSMA can help you come out of your shell and show everyone that you are a leader and you will become confident in your thoughts and opinions. When

you bring an idea or opinion to the board you their undivided attention and take consideration, and then you realize that make a difference. After that first step, you moving up so your voice and opinions will and more, and you begin to make a real difference. Another benefit is networking. So many people have no idea that having the NCSMA listed as an activity on your resume can help with finding a job. If you are unemployed, coming to your local chapter meeting or the society meetings can help you find a job by meeting and getting to know people. You never know who has a job opening at their office. Another benefit is friendships and fellowship. The friendships you make with these men and women, you will carry with you forever. You can always email or call a fellow member if you have a question or need advice about a job, or if you need someone to listen to you, or if you just need someone to hold your hand and be there through a hard time, they will be there. I have learned things from these men and women that I use in my everyday life; things that you can't learn in school or at your job”.

I call the NCSMA my second family because they truly are.

they always give your words in to you really can will want to keep be heard more

Rebecca was born and raised in Mount Airy aka Mayberry. Mount Airy is a city in Surry County, North Carolina, population 10,388 and inspired the fictional town of Mayberry

on the 1960's television program The Andy Griffith Show. Being such, the people, community, families are very close knit.

Legacy and Tradition is the hallmark, as stated by Rebecca when I asked her; **why do you have such a passion to be part of the NCSMA.**

“Growing up, I was raised with people that believed in preserving things that meant something to them, whether it is an antique dish, an old painting, or a church or society they were involved in. They would do their very best to make sure that the next generation would get as much joy out of it as they did. While they were preserving these things, they would teach the younger generation the importance, purpose, and story behind it. I guess that is why the AAMA means so much to me. Ever since I was a Medical Assisting Student, my Instructors made sure that we knew the importance of the AAMA, and as part of the curriculum, we would learn the history behind the Medical Assisting Profession and see all the hard work that these men and women put in to it. As the last few years have passed by, the people involved in the AAMA and the NCSMA have become very special to me, and they ALL have a special place in my heart. As our world has turned towards more computers, cell phones, and television, the younger generation are being taught that you don't have to communicate face to face, or you don't

house to receive the certification. My goal is that are around my age Medical Assistant than and having to get 60 Medical Assistant is nurturing, caring, and learning how to network, leader. These men and NCSMA have helped that God meant for me to Every time I go to a always learn something to bring back to better

**My goal is to show the Medical Assistants that are around my age that there is more to being a Medical Assistant than just a title behind your name and having to get 60 CEUs every 5 years. Being a Medical Assistant is about being hospitable, nurturing, caring, and confident in your own skin, learning how to network, and learning how to be TRUE leader.**

can only learn so much by taking a test online; just sitting in a hotel room talking to one of these members will teach you so much more. One of the reasons I decided to become an officer of the NCSMA at such a young age, was so that it might reach out to other Medical Assistants my age. When I first joined the NCSMA, I was very intimidated by all these men and women that had 15 years experience or more as a Medical Assistant, and that had been an officer for the NCSMA and the AAMA. I thought "why would any of these members want to hear my opinion?...who is going to listen to a new member that has no experience as a medical assistant and has never held any type of leadership role?" But as I continued to attend the meetings I quickly realized that was not the case". They WANT to hear our voices and our opinions, because we are the future of this organization and they are counting on us to keep this organization going. They have put too much hard work, dedication, and time in to it to watch it dissolve. And as you get to know all these members you will learn that being a part of these organizations is not a burden, it is an honor and a privilege.

have to actually leave your CEUs you need to keep your to show the Medical Assistants that there is more to being a just a title behind your name CEUs every 5 years. Being a about being hospitable, confident in your own skin, and learning how to be TRUE women in the AAMA and the mold me in to the young lady be...in every aspect of life. seminar or a conference I new to bring back to my job, or me as person in general. You

**During my interview with Rebecca I asked her if she would share personal obstacles she is/has overcome in her life.**

“We all face several obstacles in our life. That's how we learn and grow, and I continue to face obstacles on a daily basis. One of the biggest obstacles I have overcome was my eating disorder. For a long time I was never comfortable in my own skin. I thought I had to prove myself to my family, friends, teachers, and co-workers. I felt that I wasn't in control of my own life because I was constantly acting like a totally different person to please everyone. The only thing I could control in my life was my diet, so I chose not to eat at all. At some points when I would receive acceptance and affirmations from people, I would take a break from starving myself, but I would just go right back to it when I felt like I was a failure. I constantly worried about what everyone thought about me, it would take over my entire brain. But when I became a CMA I started learning that I am an important person, and can be loved and respected and accepted for the real me, and being involved in the AAMA and the North Carolina Society of Medical Assistants has really helped my self confidence and has helped me feel like I am an important person, and I do have a real purpose in life, and I don't have to pretend that I am something that I am not. I stopped worrying about what other people thought of me because I knew deep down in my heart that it doesn't matter what people think about you, or what people don't like you, because you know that there is someone in your life and loves you for YOU”.

**At the 2014 North Carolina Society of Medical Assistants State Convention someone shared a quote with me, and when I saw it, I knew that I needed to share it with everyone else.**

**"N.C.S.M. A. These letters do not make me better than you, these letters have made me a better person that I used to be, in every aspect of life."**

I have a rare autoimmune disorder called Chronic Acute Epstein Barr Virus. Most people have "mono" once in their life, mostly teenagers and adolescents, which is caused by the Epstein Barr Virus. Usually, once you have had mono once in your life you will never get it again, but the EBV will always be in your system...like chicken pox. My body however does not produce enough T cells (natural fighting cells) to kill the B cells which carry the EBV. After I was diagnosed with mono for the third time, my doctor did some extra blood work and it showed that my EBV titers were over 300. The normal level is under 50. After further testing and several different consultations they realized that the virus had been attacking my bones, liver, joints, and my nervous system. I have the bones of a 65 year old and I am 26. They recently figured out that most of the virus cells are settling in my lumbar spine and my hips. There is no cure for CAEBV, but it can be managed. I have treatments every week to try to kill the virus and boost my immune system. I will have flare ups for the rest of my life, but so far it has not affected my ability to work or give my patients the proper attention and compassion. I have always been very active and played sports for several years so I have had to make a big lifestyle change. It is very hard some days to walk or to even sit up, but I can't imagine not being able to take care of people, so I keep pushing on.

“I have personally battled an eating disorder and self image issues in my life. In the area I live in, eating disorders are not discussed as much as they are in the bigger cities. There are not many doctors and counselors in my area that specialize in eating disorders, and I would like to try to raise more

awareness. 1 out of 5 women have an eating disorder or have battled one in the past, and eating disorders are becoming more common in men.

I could go on and on about Rebecca; how her late grandfather, Paul Sutphin, was a famous Old Time Musician, band member of the Camp Creek Boys, the Smokey Valley Boys and how she started playing the piano at 6 years old, but singing was her true passion. But I will like to end the article with one last interview question. **What is your dream position?**

“My dream position would to be an Instructor for a Medical Assisting Program at a Community College. When I started college my major was Physical Education. The majority of my immediate families are teachers, so growing up I wanted to be a teacher as well. My late grandfather, Carlos Surratt, was the Dean of the Evening Program at Surry Community College for 27 years. For as long as I can remember I have always heard people say "Your grandfather is a wonderful person. Your grandfather helped me more than anyone else in my life. Your grandfather may have been just a teacher to some people, but to me, he was my hero." I have always wanted to make an impact of a person's life just like my grandfather did, but I figured out that I wouldn't be able to as a teacher, so I went in to the medical field. A couple of weeks before my grandfather passed away he said to me "You are an amazing CMA, but don't give up on your dream of teaching, because you will be amazing at that too." So I haven't given up on my dream to become a Medical Assisting Instructor. To me, it would be the ultimate dream job because I would have the best of both worlds”.



**“I know you didn't have this as one of the questions but I would really appreciate it if you put this small statement at the end of the article”...**

I am thankful for everyone in my life who has worked so hard to get me to where I am today. There are not enough words to express the gratitude I have for all of you. But I would like to say a special thank you to Paula Cooke. Thank you for teaching me everything I know, thank you for letting me be your shadow during my externship, thank you for befriending me, and

showing me the ropes of the NCSMA. You have taught me that being I am better than being someone I am not. Thank you for pushing me and never letting me give up. Thank you for continuing to mentor me as I become a leader in the NCSMA, and to this very day, I still consider myself your shadow because I have succeeded as a CMA because I have always followed in your footsteps.

“Nothing truly valuable can be achieved except by the unselfish cooperation of many individuals.” – [Albert Einstein](#)

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