

## CMA Program Produces 90% Retention



 UnityPoint Health

When UnityPoint Health faced a shortage of Certified Medical Assistants (CMAs) in its clinics across Iowa, it decided to create a structured “grow your own” program focused on recruiting internal staff, with impressive success. In just over two years, 135 employees have completed the 14- to 16-week fast-track program. That is a much shorter timeframe than is typical in traditional education programs but includes significantly more on-the-job training. About 90% of those newly minted CMAs continue to work in UnityPoint clinics performing a diverse range of medical and administrative duties.

To prepare, trainees spend half their time during the regular workday studying the online MedCerts curriculum and the other half engaged in hands-on clinical learning with their preceptors, while being paid for a 40-hour week. They already know the staff and culture, which can make it more comfortable to ask questions, and they are effectively being onboarded throughout the experience, accelerating their readiness and building confidence. After completing, they must pass a national exam before UnityPoint can hire them as full-fledged CMAs with responsibilities that range from drawing blood to updating patient records to processing referrals under the supervision of licensed healthcare practitioners.



**Taurie Curry**

“They don’t have to leave to grow,” said Taurie Curry, a UnityPoint Career Pathways Navigator. While new CMAs agree to continue in those roles for two years, they know they may have more opportunities later to advance because of UnityPoint’s Career Pathways initiative, which includes 15 occupations.

UnityPoint developed its Career Pathways initiative for many reasons, including shortages exacerbated by the pandemic, the anticipated retirement cliff, and space limitations in traditional healthcare preparation programs. It plans to expand this comprehensive earn-and-learn strategy – along with continuing to hire from conventional sources – to ensure high-quality care while meeting a growing demand for services. State grants have helped support the Career Pathways program, but UnityPoint has made a much larger commitment and not just because of the financial return on investment.

“We have people who want to go into healthcare who can’t get into healthcare otherwise,” said Kylie Rinehart, Senior Manager, Career Pathways. So UnityPoint helps people transform their professional lives in the communities where they have roots by eliminating barriers. That includes covering tuition, creating a condensed CMA training schedule that builds in work-life balance, and additional support, like mentoring from career navigators like Curry.

The UnityPoint survey that is conducted after each CMA cohort completes reflects how much participants appreciate that support. “I just see so much thankfulness...for giving them the opportunity to go back to school when they wouldn’t have been able to otherwise,” said Curry, who was a CMA before moving into her current leadership role