

CHAPTER 1

The Administrative Health Professional

CHAPTER SUMMARY

1. Job titles vary with the workplace setting –from medical secretary, or medical administrative assistant in health offices to unit clerk and clinical secretary in hospitals. Occupational settings are diverse from health offices to hospitals. Finding a workplace that suits your interests and competencies is important. Hospitals offer a variety of choices, from medical records and palliative care to working in a fast moving demanding area such as intensive care or on a surgical floor.
2. Professionalism in dress, appearance and manner at all times is absolutely essential. Often you will be the first point of contact for a patient, and first impressions matter. Desirable attributes include a friendly, approachable personality, a sense of responsibility, flexibility, good judgment, and the ability to remain calm in stressful situations. Skills, while they may overlap with attributes, are generally learned. Communication skills are essential, including clear enunciation, excellent spoken and written grammar, sensitive listening, and the ability to express empathy and to understand and convey information clearly. Keyboarding, computer literacy, and the ability to understand, use, and write medical terms are also indispensable.
3. As a health-care professional, you enter into a social contract with the public, your employer, and your colleagues. Given the nature of health care, expectations are high that you will perform your professional responsibilities with honesty, integrity, impartiality, and competence. Following a code of ethics based on the universal principles of autonomy, truthfulness, faithfulness, beneficence, and justice will promote trust, respect, and ethical practice.
4. When making ethical decisions, health professionals deal with a wide range of facts, concepts, contexts, principles, and people. Ideally, decision making is organized, includes all affected parties, and considers all the facts and the feelings of people involved. Ethical decisions often involve emotions, beliefs and moral conscience. Following established steps will assist you in making fair and objective decisions.
5. Typical administrative responsibilities include greeting patients, managing communications, scheduling appointments, triaging patients, and billing. Clinical responsibilities may include doing patient interviews, assisting with medical examinations, taking vital signs, and educating patients.

6. Searching for a job can be time consuming and discouraging. Having a resume that is professional in both content and format is essential. Most college will offer students in preparing resumes as well as for job interviews. If you are applying online, follow the instructions carefully, and have someone review your resume before you send it.
7. All work experience is valuable in developing transferable skills. If your program has a work placement component, treat it as though it is a job for which you have been hired. Be aware of your responsibilities as well as the obligations your workplace employer has to you. Generally, you are there to learn, not replace staff. Ask questions, be prepared, dress professionally, and follow policies and protocol. This experience could result in a job, or an outstanding reference for a future job.
8. Membership in a professional organization offers a wealth of benefits, including opportunities for ongoing education, links to employment opportunities, and networking with other members of the profession.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Discuss the potential workplace settings the AHP may work in, including job titles, roles and responsibilities
2. Explain the personal qualities and competencies necessary to be successful for those working in health administration.
3. Apply four ethical principles that are especially relevant to health care settings
4. Properly apply the five basic steps to ethical decision making.
5. Outline the administrative and clinical responsibilities of the AHP in the medical and dental office setting.
6. Demonstrate how to construct an effective résumé and conduct a job search
7. Detail the respective rights and obligations of employer and employee involved in a cooperative work placement.
8. Discuss the importance of continuing professional development.

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

1. Provide the students with examples of the variety of the duties performed by administrative assistants.
2. Discuss the wide range of employment opportunities available to the administrative health professional.
3. Remind students they are preparing for a professional career, not just a job.
4. Assign review questions and application exercises from the textbook to reinforce concepts and understanding.

5. Provide a values-clarification exercise that demonstrates how personal values can affect ethical decision making. For example, choose 10 individuals from the class to act as passengers aboard a boat that is about to sink. Give each of the people on the boat a variety of situations and characteristics that may contribute to value judgment. Have the students work in groups to decide which five people they would save, leaving the rest to drown.

The following are some possible examples of individuals. Their names and characteristics can be modified to reflect the interests of the student population in the class.

- Hank Able, age 45, released from prison serving time for fraud.
 - Father Ames, a Catholic priest returning from missionary work.
 - The current prime minister, dealing with the economic downturn.
 - Mrs. Little, who has four children under the age of 10 at home.
 - Cindy Smile, age 21, a popular honours student attending university on a basketball scholarship.
 - Susan Stile, a single mother who has been arrested twice for prostitution.
 - Harry Park age 30 & his new partner, Kent Cool, age 25.
 - Tim Timber, age 55, recently diagnosed with terminal cancer.
 - Mark Maxim, age 35, who had a leg amputated as the result of a car accident.
 - Martha Stanlake, an 85-year-old widowed millionaire.
6. Invite three administrative health professionals from various setting such as a dental office, medical office, optometrist office, clinic & hospital setting to visit the class. They can be asked to discuss their office functions and environment. Students can be prompted to prepare a number of questions ahead of time to ask the guests. For example what do you like most about your position & what do you like the least.
 7. Invite a local member of an associated professional organization or association to class to discuss the benefits of professional development & joining the professional group. See page 25-26 of text for a list of professional organizations.
 8. Design a homework assignment having students visit a member of the community most likely involved with ethical decision making. Students should visit in pairs. Suggestions for visits include religious leaders, members of institution ethical decision making teams, professors, nurses, physicians, lawyers or friends & family who have had to make hard ethical decisions. Students will present their findings in a two minute class presentation. Prior to the visit they should review the questions they intend to ask with their instructor. Examples of question can include: describing the decision to be made, what process was used to make their decision, was the decision difficult, how did they feel while deciding, do they feel good about the choice they made.

ANSWERS TO REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Calling individuals seeking health care either a *patient* or a *client* has been controversial. The concept of calling a patient a client was introduced in the late 1990s. The idea was that the term *client* empowered individuals to become stakeholders in their own healthcare, while the term *patient* put the consumer into a position of subservience to some degree. As healthcare consumers have become more informed about their own health concerns and both more proactive and responsible for their own health care decisions the role of the physician has also become more collaborative. As such, the term *patient* has evolved and come to represent someone who not only seeks health care but is active in making related decisions.
2. *Attributes* can best be described as inherent traits one possesses such as loyalty, professionalism, and honesty. Skills are learned & include such competencies as keyboarding, organization, and excellent communication skills.
3. *Professionalism* is an attribute that is vital in a health career. A professional is someone who is prepared for work by following standards, rules, and policies. Further, a professional is someone who conducts themselves in an appropriate manner with a respectful attitude. An administrative health professional understands and embraces the policies and practices of their profession.
4. *Triage* is a term used to describe the process of assessing a client's chief complaint to determine the priority of medical help needed. In some settings, such as a hospital emergency department, a specific nurse is sometimes assigned this role. However, the good judgment of the administrative health professional is necessary to help highlight the urgency of medical care. Clients will call the office with health complaints, and as an administrative health professional you must be able to recognize a potential emergency and refer the client appropriately.
5. To remain calm in an emergency situation is a desired attribute in an administrative health professional. A calm methodical approach is essential in a health crisis. Clients expect you to be able to remain focused and assist them with obtaining the necessary help they need.
6. Becoming a member of a professional association offers many benefits. Membership provides the opportunity for professional growth by promoting professional pride and providing resources and continuing education.
7. Simulated office experience provides exposure to activities that might be encountered on the job in a medical office. An externship or job placement provides the student with an opportunity to experience the work environment prior to graduation. This valuable experience provides practical exposure to activities that might be encountered on the job. A contractual agreement between the employer, the student and the college is usually prepared.
8. When writing a résumé it is recommended that you use single spacing, 10- or 12-point font, and 8.5 x 11 white or off-white paper.
9. Networking increases the possibility of finding the job you want in a timely fashion. It makes employers aware that you have the qualifications and skills

- required if a position becomes available. Employers appreciate your networking efforts because it saves them the time and money involved in advertising..
10. Cooperative Work Experience— involves responsibilities of both the student and the employer:
 - a. *Employer*— an employer has the right to expect involvement from the student and that the student will follow the rules & regulations set by the workplace. The employer can expect a positive attitude from the student. The employer will be responsible for contributing to a valuable experience for the student as well as providing feedback to the student which can form the basis of a performance evaluation.
 - b. *Student*— a student should be prepared for a work experience. They should attend a meeting with the employer to understand the employer’s expectations as well as the duties performed. The student should approach the experience with a positive manner and attitude. Be punctual and try to work with other team members in a harmonious way. Students have the opportunity to demonstrate self-awareness, honesty, and a desire for growth by acknowledging their areas in need of improvement in a positive manner.
 11. *Scope of practice* refers to working within the guidelines of duties and responsibilities outlined by one’s training, abilities and skills.
 12. Continuing Education is an expectation and responsibility in any professional role. As a professional you will be expected to keep current in your field. By attending courses you will keep abreast of technological changes occurring within the profession that may provide you with opportunity to take on more responsibility within your current job setting. Employers value self-directed and motivated professionals.

SOLUTIONS FOR SELECTED APPLICATION EXERCISES

1. Students should review the list of job opportunities in the text. They can add to this list by initiating a job search and networking within the community. Encourage the students to use several media sources when doing their search. Working in small groups will foster a broader experience. Refer to page 5-10.
2. Students should be encouraged to interview people who are employed in these areas to determine potential volunteer opportunities. This is an excellent opportunity for students to give some consideration for their future work placement or employment opportunities.
3. Despite Molly’s irritable manner, as a professional Irum needs to treat her in a professional manner which is reflected through his behaviour & attitude. When the job is not being done because of Molly’s attitude Irum must take the responsibility to take action before mistakes are made. He should follow agency guidelines & policies for registering complaints. These guidelines usually involve documenting what you have noticed & sharing your documentation with your employer or supervisor.

4. Students should be provided with some examples of résumés prior to commencing this exercise. This could also be a wonderful opportunity to have a guest speaker from a career and employment resource center to discuss résumé preparation. Make students aware that this activity will save time when they graduate and are seeking employment. By beginning the résumé process at this point, and consistently updating their résumé in the future, they will be less likely to leave out valuable experiences.
5. This exercise should generate significant discussion and yield a variety of responses. This exercise will serve as a foundation for future résumé preparation as well as interview preparation. In part b of the exercise students will carry out an individualized exercise designed to provide them with self-assessment tools. Students will identify their personal qualities as well as support ways they demonstrate each quality. In part c, students will be able to compare and contrast these qualities with their peers, which should help foster open discussion. In part d students are encouraged to identify qualities in others that they admire or wish to develop for themselves.
6. Remind students that a code of ethics provides valuable guidance for ethical decision making in a practice setting. The code reflects the AHP's commitment to meet patient needs. Instruct students to review the attributes and skills of the administrative health professional if they are having trouble coming up with ideas. Examples of items the students may include in a code of ethics are:
 - a. The AHP functions in an accountable manner by reporting any errors, thus minimizing negative consequences and ensuring the error does not occur again.
 - b. The AHP preserves client dignity through the use of sensitivity and interpersonal relationship skills.
 - c. The AHP protects the privacy and confidentiality of the client population.
 - d. The AHP maintains professional boundaries by discouraging relationships other than a professional one with clients.
 - e. The AHP collaborates with clients, team members, and the community to ensure the best health or dental care possible for their clients.
 - f. The AHP supports their professional organization to maintain the integrity of their profession.
 - g. The AHP participates in ongoing professional development to maintain their level of practice.
 - h. The AHP identifies the need to advocate for the clients in their practice.
 - I. The AHP follows agency standards to maintain a professional appearance.
 - j. The AHP maintains a calm demeanour in order to be able to think clearly and apply knowledge to practice situations.