Can you recall Ryan, the student who was interested in pursuing a career in medical assisting? After speaking to Cathy, the career counselor at his community college, Ryan learns about the types of courses and institutions where he can enroll to become a medical assistant.

Cathy informs Ryan that the process of becoming a medical assistant includes taking appropriate courses in medical assisting, leading to a diploma or associates degree and completing an exam. Students must gain a working knowledge of human anatomy, physiology, and medical terminology. Understanding the body in a healthy state will allow students to understand the body in sickness. Courses in medical assisting also include math. A medical assistant must have basic math skills, which are required to be able to make conversions and basic dosage calculations. Ryan is confident that he is prepared for the coursework that Cathy describes to him.

Accredited Learning Institutions

While discussing the educational preparation for becoming a medical assistant, Cathy informs Ryan that a medical assistant must pass a written exam to become a certified medical assistant. While this is not a requirement, she also tells him that many healthcare organizations are moving in that direction and prefer hiring only certified medical assistants. He also learns that to appear for the certification exam, he must attend an accredited institution. When a learning institution is accredited, it implies that the institution has opted for an outside organization to investigate its curriculum and certify that it meets the criteria for instructing students in the skills needed to become medical assistants. Ryan sees the value in opting for an accredited institution, since he
wants to take the certification exam. The certification process is the culmination of a student’s completion of a program in medical assisting.

**Is there a difference between a registered and certified medical assistant?**

Ryan recalls a friend mentioning the terms *registered* and *certified*. When asking Cathy about their distinction, he discovers that there is no difference between being a registered medical assistant and certified medical assistant. It only depends upon the organization administering the exam.

**Continuing Education Units (CEU)**

All licensed or certified/registered healthcare professionals are expected to take continuing education units (CEUs) in order stay abreast in their field. The requirements and time frames vary, depending on the certifying organization.

Ryan is now better informed about what he needs to do to become a medical assistant. His first step is to identify an accredited institution where he can enroll in their medical assisting course. Once he completes the course, he intends to take the certification exam and become a certified medical assistant.