

Phlebotomy As A Profession

The role of a phlebotomist has expanded, thus, creating the need to replace on-the-job training with structured training programs, which, in turn, has led to certification in phlebotomy.

Healthcare facilities are finding it advantageous to require national certification of their phlebotomists in order to be within compliance of changing requirements by state and federal agencies.

The Role of the Phlebotomist

The phlebotomist is a critical link in obtaining accurate lab results. Without a highly skilled phlebotomy team, the work of the rest of the lab cannot proceed. As a vital member of the health care team, the phlebotomist is often in a position to convey the institution's values and ideals, even before he or she uncaps a needle.

From the manner of dress, speech, and behavior of the phlebotomist, the patient will form an opinion about the quality of his care and of the institution (or medical practice) as a whole.

This is a huge responsibility. But for the dedicated ones among you, there are also great rewards. It can be tough in the beginning--learning to draw blood is not difficult, but it takes months or years to become highly proficient, and it is unlikely that you will ever run out of things to learn. Ironically, that very aspect of your profession; the challenging nature of phlebotomy, also makes it unlikely that you will ever be bored.

Duties of the phlebotomist

- Collect routine capillary and venous specimens for testing as requested.
- Prepare specimen for transport, ensuring its stability.
- Transport specimen to the laboratory.
- Promote good public relations with hospital staff and patients.
- Comply with new and revised procedures as described in the procedures manual.
- Assist in collecting and documenting monthly workload and recording data.
- Maintain safe working conditions.
- Perform laboratory computer operations.
- Participate in continuing education programs.
- Perform other tasks assigned by supervisory personnel.

Professionalism

The phlebotomist is a member of a service-oriented industry that requires professional behavior at all times. Professionalism is an attitude and a set of personal characteristics needed to succeed in this area. Other characteristics imperative to a phlebotomist include:

- Dependability
- Honesty
- Integrity
- Empathy and compassion
- Professional appearance
- Interpersonal skills

Ethical Behavior

Ethical behavior entails conforming to a standard of right and wrong to avoid harming the patient in any way. Standards of right and wrong called the “code of ethics” provide personal and professional rules of performance and moral behavior that all phlebotomists are expected to follow.

Health Care Settings

The following are the medical facilities where the phlebotomist may find work:

- Physician office laboratories – can range from simple screening tests done in a single practice office or specialized testing done in large group practices.
- Reference laboratories – These large independent laboratories perform routine and highly specialized tests that cannot be done in smaller ones. The phlebotomist may do either on-site or
 - off-site collections.
 - Urgent care centers
 - Nursing home facilities
 - Wellness clinics
 - Blood banks or hospital laboratories

Demand the best from yourself, but be patient. You may become frustrated when you encounter difficult draws. Your more experienced coworkers may obtain the sample without a problem. Utilize these coworkers as the resource they are, and ask them to show you their "tricks of the trade." With time and persistence, you will attain their skill level, or even higher.

Being human, you may make mistakes. Although there may be uncomfortable or embarrassing consequences, you must admit your errors and learn from them. By doing so, you will demonstrate to your coworkers, supervisors, and patients that you are a person of integrity and honor. You will demonstrate that you are a real professional.

What is Phlebotomy?

Phlebotomists are health care professionals who draw blood from patients for blood transfusions or laboratory testing purposes. Venipuncture, the most common phlebotomist procedure, involves drawing blood directly from the veins for blood analysis.

Before any blood can be drawn, several criteria must be met. First, phlebotomy technicians must confirm the identity of the patient. Armbands of all inpatients should reveal exact names and medical record numbers. Outpatients must individually divulge their names and dates of birth. Phlebotomists must make sure that the name and medical record number on the laboratory requisition match the information on the armband and/or information provided by the patient.

Preparatory procedures include washing hands per proper hand-washing standards and wearing appropriate gloves.

The venipuncture process requires phlebotomists to follow carefully fabricated protocol:

- Inspect the patient's arm, and then select an appropriate venipuncture site.
- Place the tourniquet approximately 3 to 5 inches above the vein site. Instruct the patient to extend his/her arm and flex and relax the fist a few times to engorge the veins for easier identification. Never leave the tourniquet on the arm for more than two minutes without releasing.
- Palpate the selected vein if necessary. Cleanse the area with alcohol or povidone-iodine prep pads. Allow the area to dry completely.
- Prepare the Vacutainer® holder by aseptically screwing in the multisampling needle into the holder. Use only holders that are equipped with a needle safety device.

- While firmly grasping the Vacutainer® holder with the dominant hand, puncture the vein at a 35° to 45° angle. As the needle enters the skin, lower the angle so that only the anterior wall of the vein is pierced. Push the Vacutainer® tube onto the needle in the holder. Maintain stability of the needle in the vein. Blood should immediately begin to fill the tube due to the vacuum action. Fill all tubes completely.
- Remove the tube and replace it with a new tube as needed, keeping the needle steady and in the vein. Gently invert the collected tube of blood several times, being careful not to shake the tube.
- When drawing multiple blood samples, it is imperative to draw the blood in a specific order to prevent contamination of subsequently drawn tubes.

After blood has been drawn, phlebotomists need to handle all samples cautiously:

- After collecting the required amount of samples, release the tourniquet. Remove the Vacutainer® tube from the holder before removing the needle from the vein.
- Press a sterile gauze pad over the venipuncture site and remove the needle. Hold the pad in place for one to three minutes until bleeding has stopped.
- After the bleeding has stopped, place a bandage over the site to prevent blood leakage.
- Medical standards mandate the immediate labeling of all specimens with the patient's name and medical record number. Be sure that the name on the requisition and corresponding tube are spelled correctly.
- After labeling the specimens, indicate the number and type of tubes drawn and the time of collection on the requisition. Sign the requisition with your name or phlebotomy identification code. Initial all blood bank tubes.
- Place all tubes in the approved specimen transport bag with the requisition and transport to the laboratory as soon as possible.
- Understand and implement all optimal storage and transportation standards.

The phlebotomist's role requires a professional, courteous, and understanding manner in all contacts with the patient. Greet the patient and identify yourself and indicate the procedure that will take place. Effective communication - both verbal and nonverbal - is essential.

Proper patient identification MANDATORY. If an inpatient is able to respond, ask for a full name and always check the armband for confirmation. DO NOT DRAW BLOOD IF THE ARMBAND IS MISSING. An outpatient must provide identification other than the verbal statement of a name. Using the requisition for reference, ask a patient to provide additional information such as a surname or birthdate.

If possible, speak with the patient during the process. The patient who is at ease will be less focused on the procedure. Always thank the patient and excuse yourself courteously when finished.

SAFETY AND INFECTION CONTROL

Because of contacts with sick patients and their specimens, it is important to follow safety and infection control procedures.

Phlebotomists are ultimately responsible for the accurate diagnosis of patients' health in regard to blood analysis. These procedures help prevent any distortions or oversights that could potentially harm the patient or produce unreliable diagnoses.

Who is a Phlebotomist?

A phlebotomist, to put it simply, is a certified and qualified technician who is well trained in the domain of blood drawing. There are physicians who do this job and also other professionals like paramedics, medical assistants and clinical laboratory scientists. The job of a phlebotomist is important because they help reduce the work load of doctors. Their primary job is blood collection, be it in hospitals or blood donation camps.

The job of a phlebotomist is a specialized one and proper certification and training is a must for someone to make a career in this field. Apart from being a qualified professional who can draw blood with minimum fuss and causing as less pain as possible, there is another important quality that a phlebotomist must possess.

There are many who have a phobia of needles. They cannot bear the thought and sight of someone puncturing their vein and drawing blood. To allay their fear, a phlebotomist needs to be a good communicator. They need to reassure the blood donator and make the process as simple as possible. People prefer visiting phlebotomists who can make them feel at ease.

How to spend a typical workday as a phlebotomist?

You will be part of the clinical laboratory team and work under one or more medical technologists. Your primary job will be to take blood, urine or stool samples for the clinical laboratories. Venipuncture is one of the important jobs that will keep you busy. As part of venipuncture, you must assemble all the equipment required to draw blood. You will then need to put a tourniquet on the arm of the patient, swab the puncture area with antiseptic and draw blood by inserting a needle into the vein. You will collect the blood in a tube and seal the puncture by applying pressure. The tube now needs to be labeled. You need to follow all safety procedures during this entire process.

How to draw blood?

The first step in the process of drawing blood is to take the details of the patient – the name and date of birth. You will need this information to label his or her blood sample tube. Your next job is to arrange all the required accessories like needles, tubes, alcohol swab and tourniquet. You now need to draw blood from the inner part of the forearm called the median cubital vein. This vein is close to the skin and not surrounded by too many nerves. Put the tourniquet on the arm to make the vein prominent. Pat it and find out the best angle to insert the needle. The needle insertion must be done quickly and smoothly to lessen the pain. The vacutainer must be now pushed into the holder and it will fill automatically with the required amount of blood sample needed. If you are using an old syringe, you

can draw blood into the syringe by drawing it back. Pull out the needle and apply gauze to the wound with appropriate pressure. Mix the sample and label the tube.

How to handle difficult phlebotomy cases?

In case you are not able to locate the vein, you must ask the patient to clench his or her fist to make it prominent. If the elbow area vein is not prominent, you can also draw blood from one of the veins in the hand, wrist or feet. If you cannot puncture the vein properly, immediately ask for assistance from another phlebotomist. You may also need to deal with patients who have undergone numerous venipuncture procedures due to treatment by chemotherapy. In such cases, you may need to make multiple punctures. If a patient feels unwell during the venipuncture process, you may make him or her lie down and make them comfortable.

How to calm patients who are scared?

In case a patient is scared or anxious, you must engage him or her in conversation to calm the nerves. Your job will be to take the patient's mind off the venipuncture process. As a phlebotomist, it is not only your job to draw blood expertly but also to be able to make your patients feel comfortable. You must be soft spoken with great interpersonal skills.