

Warning: Diploma Mills!

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Various state offices, consumer protection agencies, and educational websites warn consumers that along with the boom of new schools and distance education programs come hidden pitfalls not always easily recognized.

Government and state agencies across the U.S., along with **Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)**, a private, nonprofit national organization that coordinates accreditation activity in the United States, and various other consumer protection and educational websites warn consumers that along with the boom of new schools and distance education programs offered online come certain hidden pitfalls not always easily recognized.

Potential students should inform themselves to avoid hidden pitfalls before signing up for a program. For example, if a website promises vocational training online to earn a diploma in just 6-8 weeks, and promises that upon completion a person will be ready to hit the workforce without additional training, or an internship -- then consumer beware! Caution and awareness is always good policy when it comes to online education and degrees. Just because a program offers education or training for a fee it doesn't automatically mean it is a good program, or legit.

This is not to discourage anybody; indeed, there are many excellent distance education programs offered online, including for the healthcare professionals. Plenty of people have taken them and achieved success. However, in their quest for better education, or specialized vocational training there is a chance that an uninformed consumer might encounter so-called "diploma mills" -- dubious providers of education that ends in certificates and degrees that are considered worthless on the job market. Bogus certificates from diploma mills aren't worth the effort, time, money, or paper they are printed on. Websites that feature such proclamations right on their home page should be critically examined to determine whether these claims are merely common catch phrases, or the assertions are legit. CHEA states that diploma mills are a disservice to the public, and specifically warns about diploma and accreditation mills:

-Diploma mills and accreditation mills mislead and harm. In the U.S., degrees and certificates from mills may not be acknowledged by other institutions when students seek to transfer or go to graduate school. Employers may not acknowledge degrees and certificates from diploma mills when providing tuition assistance for continuing education. "Accreditation" from an accreditation mill can mislead students and the public about the quality of an institution.

The **U.S. Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES)**, the only agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a institutional and specialized accreditor for healthcare education and training says the same: Accreditation by ABHES signifies that the institution or program has met the eligibility criteria and evaluation standards of ABHES and complies with the policies and procedures for maintenance of accreditation as established by ABHES. Awareness is the key! One important aspect to consider when selecting a local or distance education or training program is the school's reputation. The institution must be honest and credible in their dealings with the public, have a clean record, and should be approved, and/or accredited by the right organization. It is the presence of a number of certain features taken together that should raise a red flag to signal that this could be a diploma mill:

- Web page advertisements that contain bold text, images, seals and profound sounding designations

- Announcements that the school is accredited may contain words such as approved, accredited, authorized, qualified, licensed, sponsored, recognized, and registered.

Danni R. , owner of **Advanced Medical Assistant Custom Web Design, LLC**, and publisher of well known medical assistant career websites on the Internet has also been working diligently to get the word out about diploma mills and bogus accreditation credentials. She says that there ARE many legitimate institutions that offer vocational education programs on campus, and online that are not necessarily accredited (yet), but they are licensed by their local Department of Education. These institutions went through a rigorous review process by a commission of state elected officials who verify that the school meets a set standard and criteria. Online courses will not be accredited or approved by the board of education unless they truly meet established national standards. The application process for reviews and approval is tedious and lengthy! Only the best programs achieve accreditation.

-- I've heard horror stories from student's whose diploma was worthless and job placement assistance consisted of nothing but a copy of doctors listed in the local area's Yellow Pages (if that much!).

To learn more about the medical assistant profession, training standards, and quality education visit her websites at Medical Assistant Net at <http://www.medicalassistant.net> and Advanced Medical Assistant of America at <http://www.certmedassistant.com>.

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