



HEALTH CARE Recruiting Guide

Becoming a Nurse

So, you want to become a nurse? Making the decision is a first important step into a rewarding career in which you will be able to not only provide bedside care but enter leadership roles, advocate for patients and specialize in a specific area.

As with many fields, education is paramount to fulfilling your dreams of becoming a nurse. There are many paths in nursing, and it is important to know what lies ahead.

STEP ONE: PICK YOUR PATH

It is important first to decide what you want to get out of your nursing career and what type of environment you want to work in. Nurses work in a variety of settings, from hospitals and doctor's offices to nursing homes and the homes of their patients.

What population do you want to serve? Are you drawn to providing compassionate care to geriatric patients or would the intensity of critical care inspire you more? Knowing the answers to these questions will help you decide what education, licensing and certifications you will need.

STEP TWO: EARN YOUR DEGREE

While most programs are a balance of clinical experience and classroom learning, deciding which career path you want to follow will dictate your educational path. Important questions to consider before choosing a program relate to your lifestyle



and current financial situation.

Do you want to be on campus, or would online learning fit your schedule better? Many online programs allow you to complete clinical rota-

tions in your local community.

STEP THREE: GET LICENSED

After you complete your education, you will need to

take a licensing exam to demonstrate your knowledge and skills. The exam you take will depend on your career path:

- **Certified nursing assistant (CNA):** a state competen-

cy exam

- **Licensed practical nurse (LPN):** the National Council Licensure Examination (specifically for LPNs)

- **Registered nurse (RN):** the National Council Licensure Examination (specifically for RNs)

- **Nurse practitioner:** a national certification exam administered by either the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners or the American Nurses Credentialing Center.

STEP FOUR: NEVER STOP LEARNING

The learning opportunities don't end after you pass your licensing examination. Nurses are required to complete continuing education courses to ensure they stay up to date on changes and advancements in the field. To keep their license, most nurses are required to earn a specific number of continuing education credits every few years.

Be sure to check with your state nursing board for requirements specific to your state. You also can earn a professional certification to specialize in a certain area of nursing. Getting certified in a specialized area is a great way to demonstrate your commitment to your career, as well as showcase your skill set to prospective employers.

Levels of Nursing

There are many levels of nursing, as well as opportunities for advancement in the field. Make sure you are knowledgeable on what distinguishes each nursing stage so that you can choose the path most suited to your needs, skill set and career goals.

CERTIFIED NURSING ASSISTANT (CNA)

Duties: Assist in daily tasks, such as feeding and bathing patients. They also clean rooms, answer patient calls and report any issues to a nurse.

Education: This path only requires a post-secondary certification and can usually be earned in four to 12 weeks.

Best suited for: Those who want to enter the field quickly or want to gain additional practical experience while continuing their education.

LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSE (LPN)

Duties: Provide basic care, including dressing and changing bandages, under the supervision of an RN.

Education: Certification and, in some cases, a one-year diploma or associate degree.

Best suited for: Those who want to enter the field quickly but hope to become a registered nurse (RN). LPN experience can usually be applied toward the completion of an RN program.

REGISTERED NURSE

Duties: Coordinate patient care, assist with exams and surgeries, administer medication, as well as promote wellness and manage other nurses.



Education: Associate degree or bachelor's degree, as well as national certification.

Best suited for: Those who wish to experience the full diversity of a nursing career

and are interested in further growth in their careers.

DIPLOMA DEGREES IN NURSING

Other diploma degrees in

nursing require nurses to hold a bachelor's degree. Many schools, however, are adopting "bridge programs," which allow students to earn two degrees at once (either a BSN

and MSN, or an MSN and DPN) or are designed in such a way that students may continue their education from undergraduate to graduate work without interruption.

Making Your Mark

Many health care professionals did not begin their careers in the field. Some got degrees in art history, marketing or computer science before feeling the urge to serve their communities through advocacy and care.

Does this sound like you? If you are unhappy or not feeling challenged in your current position — or need to change your career because of salary, lay-offs or other reasons — consider health care.

Few other fields offer the breadth and variety of advancement opportunities that the medical field provides. You can license at different levels, specialize in different areas, travel and — with the growing specialty of virtual nursing — work from home if you wish.

Many schools now offer what they call an accelerated bachelor of science in nursing, which is a degree specifically designed for those who already hold credentials in another discipline.

There may be specific math and science requirements you'll need to meet, but most programs will waive all other general education requirements. Because of this waiver, most students are able to complete the degree program in as



little as 18 months.

COMPLEMENTARY OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN HEALTH CARE

There are many ways to advance your career if you already hold a nursing or medical administration degree. You might consider specializing in an area if you don't already. Or you can earn

a new specialization.

Not only will you be able to provide a new kind of care, but by taking on an additional specialty, you are diversifying your skill set, further making you a commodity worth keeping (or hiring).

Teaching also might be a new and exciting opportunity if you begin to feel like you're not being challenged by providing

care as a nurse or physician.

Guiding others into and within the field can be a rewarding experience.

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

If you are a true expert in your field, consider taking your message and knowledge to the masses. You can start a blog or Internet podcast to educate audiences about your specialty.

These types of “thought leadership” activities can position both you and your organization for more visibility in the media and industry. Interview others in your field for their insights to create a sense of community among your readers or listeners. The more connections you make, the more well-rounded your presence in the health care industry.

Nurse Practitioners

According to the American Association of Nurse Practitioners, there were approximately 225,000 nurse practitioners licensed in the United States as of 2016, attending to more than 900 million visits by Americans every year.

Nurse practitioners bring a comprehensive perspective to health care and health management through diagnosis, treatment and prevention.

Considering becoming a nurse practitioner? Here's what you need to know:

WHAT DISTINGUISHES THE NP

Nurse practitioners provide all the care registered nurses provide, but with greater breadth and depth. They generally work in collaboration with other health professionals but can work more on their own than other nurses.

Nurse practitioners provide a full-range of services, including ordering and performing diagnostic tests, diagnosing and treating chronic conditions, and providing counseling and education to patients on positive health and lifestyle choices.

The most notable difference between a nurse practitioner and a registered nurse is the NP's ability to prescribe medications and other treatments.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Nurse practitioners must complete a higher degree program, either a master's or doctoral degree in nursing. They also must have earned advanced training beyond their initial registered nurse training.

Another requirement is diverse experience and training in areas of primary care, acute care and long-term health care.

QUALIFICATIONS

Nurse practitioners undergo rigorous national certification as well as periodic peer review. Many nurse practitioners conduct research and apply their find-



ings to clinical practice, but all NPs must participate in continuing education and professional health care forums.

BY THE NUMBERS

Here are some interesting facts about the profession, according to the American Association of Nurse Practitioners:

- 83.4 percent of NPs are trained in

primary care.

- 49.9 percent of NPs hold hospital privileges; 11.3 percent have long-term care privileges.

- 95.8 percent of NPs prescribe medications, and those in full-time practice write an average of 23 prescriptions per day.

- NPs hold prescription privileges, including controlled substances in all 50 states and D.C.

- In 2016, the mean, full-time base salary was \$102,526.

- The majority (60.7 percent) of NPs see three or more patients per hour.

- Malpractice rates remain low; only 1.9 percent of NPs have been named as the primary defendant in a malpractice case.

- Nurse practitioners have been in practice an average of 12 years.
- The average age of NPs is 49 years.

Five Growing Specialties

With the field of nursing expanding every day due to technology advancements and increased demand thanks to an aging baby boomer population, nursing specialties are a great way to strengthen your career path by defining where your passions lie as well as both honing and diversifying your skill set.

Check out these five growing specialties in nursing:

NURSE MIDWIVES

Nurse midwives play a critical role in women's health care. These nurses do more than deliver babies; they continue to work with new mothers and newborns as primary care providers. Additionally, the National Library of Medicine finds nurse midwives to be significant in improving women's health care in both inner-city and more rural areas of the United States, where basic care shortages are at critical levels.

TRAVEL NURSES

Travel nursing is one way the field is addressing the current nursing shortage. This career is not for the faint of heart, nor those who wish to have a more stable address. Travel nurses are employed in places of crisis, due to natural disaster and nursing strikes, among other reasons for temporary critical shortages. Travel nurses tend to garner higher-than-average pay due to the "pick up and go" quality of the job, but never know where they will be placed next.

NURSE EDUCATOR

Share your knowledge. Nursing shortages are discussed frequently, but nursing faculty shortages are often overlooked. With increases in the number of students pursuing a nursing career, it only follows that faculty numbers are strained. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing asserts that more than 68,000 qualified students were declined admittance to a nursing pro-



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gram in 2014 in part due to faculty shortages.

VIRTUAL NURSE

Many medical websites and hosted platforms are recruiting nurses for providing care and guidance through

online chat or over the telephone. Most aspects of this job involve basic care, however, there is still room for specialization.

NURSING INFORMATICS

Nursing informatics is all about the

technology associated with nursing. Professionals in this field design and test new platforms for patient evaluation and care, introduce and teach new information technology to others and develop new ways for ensuring patient security and confidentiality.



SHOW ME THE MONEY

While landing and securing a job tops the list of career concerns, salary is a close second. “The Nurse Journal: Social Community for Nurses Worldwide” compiles a list of average salaries for RNs across the country, which they calculate through more than 250 sources. Here is what a registered nurse can expect to earn as of 2014:

Alaska: \$49,000	Montana: \$58,000
Alabama: \$67,000	Nebraska: \$48,000
Arizona: \$54,000	Nevada: \$51,000
Arkansas: \$66,000	New Hampshire: \$65,000
California: \$71,000	New Jersey: \$71,000
Colorado: \$59,000	New Mexico: \$58,000
Connecticut: \$76,000	New York: \$80,000
District of Columbia: \$82,000	North Carolina: \$63,000
Delaware: \$58,000	North Dakota: \$59,000
Florida: \$61,000	Ohio: \$63,000
Georgia: \$75,000	Oklahoma: \$61,000
Hawaii: \$41,000	Oregon: \$63,000
Idaho: \$44,000	Pennsylvania: \$63,000
Illinois: \$75,000	Rhode Island: \$60,000
Indiana: \$63,000	South Carolina: \$64,000
Iowa: \$64,000	South Dakota: \$50,000
Kansas: \$60,000	Tennessee: \$61,000
Kentucky: \$57,000	Texas: \$64,000
Louisiana: \$58,000	Utah: \$52,000
Maine: \$58,000	Vermont: \$58,000
Maryland: \$68,000	Virginia: \$66,000
Massachusetts: \$79,000	Washington: \$68,000
Michigan: \$67,000	West Virginia: \$62,000
Minnesota: \$58,000	Wisconsin: \$59,000
Mississippi: \$69,000	Wyoming: \$55,000
Missouri: \$65,000	

Job Outlook for Nurses

Nurses enjoy a good amount of job security, as nurses will always be needed in the health care system.

According to the American Nurses Association, there are

more than 3.1 million registered nurses in the United States. However, our need for more nurses is only increasing. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, by

2024 there will be approximately 439,000 new nursing jobs created.

If we factor in the number of nurses that will be leaving the field in this time, nurses can

expect a pool of more than 1 million jobs that will need to be filled.

While nursing shortages are expected throughout the country, some states more than oth-

ers are projected to feel the shortage. According to an article published in the American Journal of Medical Quality, states in the west and south will be hit the hardest.

Outside the Hospital

The need for health care providers has exploded in recent years, due to the aging U.S. population.

According to a study conducted by Economic Modeling Specialists, and reported by CareerBuilder, the number of jobs aiding the elderly and people with disabilities increased by 70 percent from 2010 to 2013.

With this type of increase, it's not surprising that the Bureau of Labor Statistics is estimating that more than 1 million nursing jobs will become available by 2024. If you are interested in working with the elderly, consider the following career opportunities.

HOME CARE SERVICES

Home health nurses help older people manage the strains of aging at home, including patients who struggle with dementia or are recovering from surgery. This helps people to continue living a life that is familiar to them, outside of a nursing home or assisted living center.

Registered nurses and professionals with a bachelor of science in nursing are eligible to certify as a care manager or case manager to specialize with geriatric patients. Care managers work with patients and their families to design and decide on a care plan and can be essential when difficult decisions need to be made.

REHABILITATION CENTERS

Positions at rehabilitation centers are another growing opportunity for nurses who are interested in helping people recover from injuries or surgeries. Nurses in these facilities often not only provide rehab services but



ongoing care, as well. Nurses in these positions need to be aware of both the injury at hand and any limitations on the patient due to aging.

ASSISTED LIVING

Assisted living centers specialize in providing a more relaxed kind of care, offering aging populations an option for independence with the added benefit of needed care. Nurses employed in these centers are more focused on encouraging mental, physical and even social health.

HOSPICE CARE

Hospice care nurses often work with other health care professionals to provide support for those facing terminal illness. Compassion in care is what hospice nursing is all about. These nurses work to manage pain and provide day-to-day care as well as resilient emotional support for their patients and patients' families. Nurses in hospice care must also be diligent in their knowledge of the legal and ethical implications associated with end-of-life care.

CARE COORDINATION

While care coordination is a part of any nursing job, many facilities are hiring registered nurses to focus more fully in this role as needs of the population increase. Care coordination is an often overlooked yet vital position within the nursing field. Registered nurses can improve both care quality and outcomes across health care settings through their coordination of patient care. The American Nurses Association view care coordination as a core professional standard.