

Health Care CAREERS





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Pandemic Shines Light on Need

Well before the novel coronavirus pandemic emerged, health care workers had long been in high demand. But as the virus spread, workers at all levels — from technicians to doctors, but especially nurses — became heroic frontline workers cheered and honored by people coast to coast for putting themselves at risk to care for the sick and dying.

The crisis underscored the need for qualified health care workers even more, as students in medical and nursing school were drafted into service, and those from areas of the country where cases were low or manageable volunteered to fill the gaps in major hot spots such as New York, Detroit and New Orleans, among other cities.

If you've considered a career in health care, you've likely been drawn to the field by the twin desires of developing a career that speaks to a need to serve others with compassionate care

and to make a real difference, along with the long-term benefits of working in a respected profession that offers growth, pay and benefits almost unequalled in any other job.

LAUNCHING A HEALTH CARE CAREER

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, health care careers are the fastest growing in the nation, expected to expand 18% from 2016-2026, if not more, adding an estimated 2.4 million new jobs — more than any

other field.

Selecting any career is a decision that shouldn't be taken lightly, however, especially one that often requires extensive training and dedication. If you're considering joining this prestigious, rewarding field here are a few questions to consider and some steps to help navigate your path.

Chances are if you're reading this, you've already answered the two most important questions in choosing health care as a career path: Are you seeking a field in which you can help others, and are you interested in a profession offering personal and professional growth over a wide range of positions?

This guide will highlight some of the more prominent and fast-growing occupations within health care, but it will also point a spotlight on some of the unsung roles within the field. There are many options with just as many paths to consider.

CONSIDERATIONS

It can be difficult to know where to start since there are so many types of health care careers to choose from. A simple first step is to look at the broad career paths and see which ones fit best with your needs and goals.

The Ultimate Medical Academy also offered some questions designed to help you narrow your choices:

- How long do you want to attend school?
- What kind of salary suits your lifestyle?
- What is the career outlook for your desired position?

These questions can help you find the career option to best meet your needs. But you might also want to consider where you'd like to live, as the need for specific professions have increased in certain cities because of the pandemic and are unlikely to change for the near future.

Helping People Breathe

Because COVID-19 primarily affects the lungs, the field of respiratory therapy has grown in awareness among the general public. This often-overlooked health care profession focuses on helping people to breathe, including connecting patients to now-familiar ventilators and managing oxygen flow.

But respiratory therapy suffered a shortage even before becoming part of the highlighted frontline workers in health care in the pandemic.

THE ROLE

These critical specialists care for patients who have trouble breathing when suffering from, for example, asthma or COPD, or chronic respiratory diseases such as emphysema.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, respiratory therapists work mostly in hospitals but can also be found in other medical facilities such as nursing homes and assisted living facilities.

Respiratory therapists typically need an associate degree, but bachelor's degrees have become the more common standard. Respiratory therapists are licensed in all states except Alaska; requirements vary by state, BLS reports.

According to the American Association for Respiratory Care, a day in the life of a therapist is diverse, challenging and might include:

- Diagnosing lung and breathing disorders and recommending treatment



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methods.

- Interviewing patients and doing chest physical exams to determine what kind of therapy is best for their condition.
- Consulting with physicians to recommend a change in therapy based on an evaluation of the patient.
- Analyzing breath, tissue and blood specimens to determine levels of oxygen and other gases.
- Managing ventilators and artificial airway devices for patients who can't breathe normally on their own.
- Responding to emergency situations and urgent calls for care.
- Educating patients and families about lung disease so they can maximize their quality of life.

SPECIALTIES

Some specialties within the field include:

Emergency respiratory therapy: Hospital-based respiratory therapists assist with emergency care in helping people recover from such circumstances as heart surgery or lung failure. Others provide their skills during surgery and treat pneumonia, but all fields involve the connection, monitoring and maintenance of ventilators.

Adult respiratory therapy: These respiratory therapists can work in hospitals, outpatient clinics or in homes and assist with routine care and maintenance of such diseases as emphysema.

Pulmonary rehabilitation: This spe-

cialty assists in the recovery of breathing capacity after surgery or a traumatic event. You can also find these therapists in sleep labs, where they assist in diagnosis and treatment of sleep apnea.

Pediatric respiratory therapy: As indicated, these specialists work with newborns and children with cardiopulmonary issues. They can work in inpatient settings or a neonatal intensive care unit, sometimes also treating children with asthma.

Geriatric respiratory therapy: As people age, some experience a lack of breathing capacity because of respiratory infections, COPD and bronchial pneumonia. Geriatric respiratory therapists care for these people in hospitals, outpatient clinics or in their homes.

Contract Tracers Take Starring Role

Once a mundane but routine function among public health agencies, contract tracers have taken on a starring role during the pandemic and their function will be much in demand now and in the future.

These professionals are focused on curbing more outbreaks of the coronavirus, during which their self-explanatory jobs are critical in identifying those who have come into contact with an infected person. It is through their work that the public can again feel confident to return to a more normal life feeling safer.

But contact tracers have long assisted in the fight against the spread of disease, tracing outbreaks of measles, tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases and other infections affecting large segments of the population.

THE ROLE

Public health contact tracers often work from home, calling those identified by an infected patient whom they've been in close contact with over a period of time before they knew they were infected. They caution these people to isolate themselves and encourage them to get tested themselves. They also spend time identify-



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ing people they might have been in close contact with to further track down possible other infections.

In the case of COVID-19 and other highly contagious infectious diseases, those who live in the same household of the

patient are at high risk for becoming infected themselves. Anyone spends more than 10 minutes within six feet of a person who tested positive, as early as two days before the person got sick, would be considered a medi-

um risk. The tracing extends from there, as does their advice to isolate or self-quarantine as appropriate, and to call their doctor if they develop symptoms.

As with all public health dangers involving the spread

of a virus, the more people who are contacted, the more spread can be contained.

OUTLOOK

Demand for contact tracers is very high. The position involves training, but public health experts say these crucial roles can be filled by anyone with reasonable social skills who enjoy talking with people and who possess the ability to convey key messages and collect data.

States and counties take different approaches to hiring contact tracers. Some rely on their own health departments, while others partner with non-profit public health organizations. There's no centralized location to find contract tracing positions — yet. But as the virus continues to ebb and flow, one might certainly be developed. For now, searching “contact tracer jobs” should bring up plenty of listings.

If you've been furloughed or laid off from another position or career, becoming a contact tracer is an excellent opportunity to serve the country, specifically people in your own community and region, and help manage this crisis.

Some tech companies like Apple and Google are developing apps to assist in making contact tracing easier, but a human force will always be necessary to make personal contact.

These positions may also be a springboard to future roles in public health or another of the many health care careers that are also in vital demand.

Techs Vital to Pharmacies

Chances are you come in contact with pharmacy technicians more than any other health care worker. They greet customers and assist them in getting their medications from pharmacists and answer questions about cost, insurance, and any possible conflicts a medication might present.

Clearly, pharmacy techs do more than just fetch medicines and ring up purchases. A pharmacy technician works closely with pharmacists and other health care professionals in diverse settings such as hospitals, clinics and community pharmacies, as well as drug stores and supermarkets, where pharmacies are increasingly found.

BECOMING A PHARMACY TECH

Exciting and challenging career opportunities exist for full- or part-time work as a pharmacy technician, especially for those with formal training or previous experience.

After a period of time training and gaining experience, pharmacy techs may be pro-



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moted to supervisory roles. Some use the role as a practical tool while they gain the further education necessary to become a pharmacist.

There are also opportunities to specialize. Technicians in hospital settings can train to focus in such areas as sterile compounding, pharmacy automation, hazardous drug management, revenue cycle management and health information systems.

According to the American Society of Hospital Pharmacists, 56% of organizations offer career advancement

opportunities for technicians, and 81% indicated they expect to perform duties of pharmacy technician for five-plus years.

In the consumer world of drug and grocery stores, pharmacy techs can expect to work a variety of shifts as these retail outlets expand hours to meet the prescription demands of working families; many are now open 24 hours a day. As technicians advance in their careers, they can occupy senior positions that allow them to adjust these schedules. There's also many opportunities for part-time work in

both hospitals and in the community.

OUTLOOK

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, pharmacy technician employment is anticipated to develop quickly because of growing use of medications as a treatment for patients. Additionally, a larger number of middle-aged and elderly people — who typically use more health care services — will drive the need for technicians in all practice surroundings. Pharmacy technicians are expected to see a 12%

increase in hiring through 2026, according to the BLS, 7% faster than average job growth across all occupations.

Many states require pharmacy technicians to pass an exam or participate in formal education. Technical or career schools can help students learn the skills they need to become a pharmacy technician.

These programs may be completed in one year, though students can go on to get an associate degree if they choose, which could make them more competitive candidates.

The Role of Imaging Techs

Radiologic technicians, also called X-ray technicians or radiographers, are among the most-wanted and fastest-growing professionals in health care.

X-rays are a routine part of almost every physical exam and are especially important in assisting doctors to treat patients by allowing them to clearly examine tissues, organs, bone and vessels.

ON THE JOB

Because physicians rely heavily on radiologic images, X-ray techs must perform precise work with sophisticated machines, maintain a close attention to detail while always taking care to protect patients from the harmful rays the machine emit.

Radiologic techs are usually employed by hospitals, where they operate and often consult with physicians after taking images. The health care professionals often specialize in one or more of the following fields: magnetic resonance imaging, sonography, mammography, computed tomography, nuclear medicine or radiation therapy. The specialty focus areas can greatly improve opportunities in the field and increase earning potential, especially if



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a tech is experienced in several specialties.

Besides maintaining knowledge in radiography, anatomy and pathology, a big part of a technician's job is direct contact with patients, providing information and instructions to many who may be nervous about radiologic procedures. Gaining these interpersonal skills and a manner that brings a sense of comfort and confidence to patients.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

While education requirements and licensing vary by

state, most radiologic technicians obtain an associate or bachelor's degree. Courses typically include a mix of classroom and practical study, as well as on-site training. Subjects include pathology, patient care, radiation techniques, and image production and evaluation.

Those who pursue advanced degrees with training in multiple specialties in areas such as MRIs, CTs or mammography widen their employment potential and a generally more sought after.

After graduation, radiologic technicians can be accredited

by the national Joint Review Committee on Education in Radiologic Technologists. Some states require JRCERT accreditation, so be sure to inquire about licensing certifications in your state. After certification, techs can attain further credentials by taking an American Registry of Radiologic Technologists exams.

CAREERS

While the majority of radiologic techs work in hospitals, others find work in private health care facilities, medical centers or private imaging cen-

ters. Some larger physician groups employ their own techs.

Clear paths to career advancement are available to multi-credentialed technologists both within the radiology department (as manager), college-level instruction or becoming a radiology assistant or radiologist.

With the coronavirus likely to exist in society even after a vaccine is developed, in addition to existing conditions, another pandemic is almost guaranteed. As a new wave of Americans gets older, there's no shortage of opportunity and career growth.

LPNs Backbone of Nursing Structure

Perhaps no other role in health care is as broad and varied as that of licensed practical nurses, or LPNs.

LPNs form the backbone of nursing efforts of health care organizations — hospitals and other private and government health care facilities, to name just a few. The credentials and wide-ranging abilities of LPNs make the field a standout career choice.

Licensed practical nurses are in demand not only in hospitals and clinics, but throughout the health care field. You'll find them in doctor's offices, private care facilities, nursing homes, even in state and federal agencies and in private-sector businesses, as well as in education.

Their duties include providing routine patient care and observation, assisting doctors and RNs, and of course, dealing directly with patients and families offering advice and guidance.

These health care professionals also act as a frontline force in health care education and licensing, and many supplement their main careers as teachers or by offering their expertise to such fields as medical coding and billing, as well as call centers and customer service.



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THE ROAD TO LPN

Like many other licensed, accredited health care professions, becoming an LPN begins with an investment in education at a nursing school, of which there are thousands across the U.S. Most can combine coursework in-class and online. Most offer LPN-to-RN programs and even RN-to-BSN programs, offering a seamless transition upward through a health care career.

Prior to launching the academic portion of your new career, you'll confront the

TEAS exam, or Test of Essential Academic Skills, similar to the familiar SAT or ACT exams.

An LPN education can be completed in as few as 12 months, and includes coursework in clinical education in class or online, making it very accessible to many with a flexibility that allows you to go at your own pace. During this period, future LPNs study the ins and outs of patient care in a variety of settings. But every program requires a dedicated effort to complete

the education program.

Another exam, the National Council Licensure Examination, or NCLEX, qualifies you to actually begin practicing as a nurse. This is the final step for licensure, but successfully completing your LPN education will more than prepare you for the exam and your future career.

THE JOB

A richly rewarding career awaits those who pursue this path. Connections made through clinical and volun-

teering, along with mentors in your chosen setting — in hospitals, residential care and home health care, to name but a few — can open doors to opportunity.

Along the way, continuing education programs can help you advance. There are more than 4.5 million practicing nurses in the U.S., the second-largest group of licensed professionals in the nation. Professional development and continuing education can aid you in advancing in this exciting health care field.

Psychiatric Aides

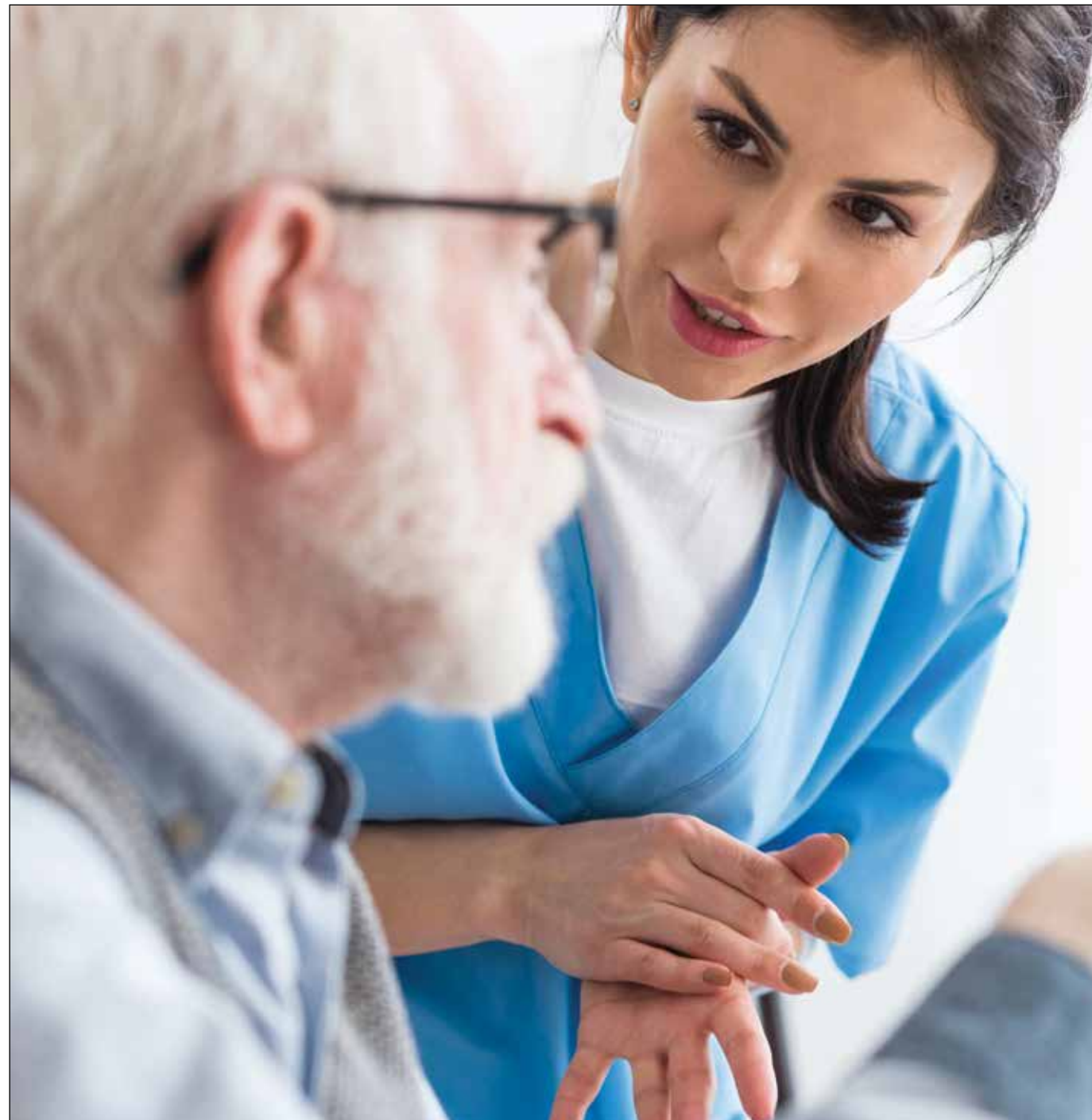
Our nation is experiencing a global pandemic and mass unemployment. After living under quarantine for months, we have slowly emerged to see large-scale protests against police brutality that have also brought violence and chaos in cities large and small.

For those with existing mental health issues, the constant cycle of bad news emerging from all these concerns can make those issues even more intense.

While the effects of all these developments have yet to be calculated, it's clear that those involved in mental health care will play a critical role in helping the country heal. One way to join that effort and begin a rewarding health care career is to pursue a path to becoming a psychiatric aide.

THE ROLE

Psychiatric aides are truly first responders in any mental health care issue that presents. They are first in line, for example, in primarily being responsible for caring for patients, observing their behavior, monitoring their vital signs and administering



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medications, typically in in-patient hospital setting.

As entry-level mental health care professionals, aides are supervised by both mental and medical staff, who outline the care and treatment of those admitted with mental health issues.

These compassionate work-

ers are also responsible for helping patients manage such daily tasks as bathing, getting dressed and eating. Many also have housekeeping responsibilities, ensuring their patients have safe, clean, organized rooms.

Psychiatric aides also participate in programs and

activities for patients, such as orientation for incoming patients or medication presentations, as well as organizing recreational activities.

The majority of aides work in hospitals in psychiatric wards and substance abuse units, but some also work in state-run facilities or residen-

tial treatment centers. There are also opportunities in outpatient care, community centers and doctor's offices.

BECOMING A PSYCHIATRIC AIDE

The bar for becoming a psychiatric aide is low. With just a high school diploma or the equivalent, training begins on the job. Naturally, some postsecondary coursework in psychology and mental health can provide an advantage. Licenses are only required for those who choose to become psychiatric technicians, and then only in four states (California, Colorado, Kansas and Arkansas). But aides can become certified through the American Association of Psychiatric Technicians, which can provide further advancement opportunities.

On the job, psychiatric aides begin by working alongside experienced aides and techs, attending workshops and seminars, as well participating in service activities. Other training may include manuals or online courses and materials related to a specific facility or duties.

Becoming a psychiatric aide is both a rewarding career in itself and can open doors into a world of opportunity in the field. While you become experienced, you can study and become certified, grow into higher-level jobs, such as a psychiatric technician, eventually attaining more responsibility and growth along with financial security.