

Health Care Careers



Caring For the Physically Active

Athletic trainer is a great health care occupation for those who love sports and want to work with athletes, coaches and other health care professionals. They specialize in preventing, diagnosing and treating injuries and illnesses related to physical activity.

Athletic trainers are often hired by sports teams and get to attend games and travel with the team. They work at schools and universities to treat student athletes. Other places they may work include hospitals, clinics, fitness centers, gyms or even in corporations where they provide injury prevention services to workers. The military and law enforcement agencies hire civilian athletic trainers to treat soldiers and officers.

Is your interest more in performing arts than sports? There has been a growing need for athletic trainers with performing arts organizations, especially those heavy in dance, acrobatics and other movement. Some institutions that hire athletic trainers, according to Kent State University, are Cirque Du Soleil, Disney, Radio City



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Music Hall, The Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, the Cincinnati Ballet and Blue Man Group.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Athletic trainers assess and manage a wide range of injuries, from acute injuries such as sprains and strains to chronic conditions such as overuse injuries. They develop injury prevention programs and educate people on proper exercise techniques and equipment use. They work with injured athletes, helping them in the rehabilitation process so that they

can regain strength, mobility and function.

QUALIFICATIONS

Most athletic trainers have a bachelor's degree or master's degree from an accredited athletic training program. These programs include coursework in anatomy, physiology, biomechanics, nutrition and injury prevention. They usually also require students to have clinical rotations to gain hands-on experience.

Once you have a degree, you must pass a national certifica-

tion exam from the Board of Certification for the Athletic Trainer. Different states have their own licensing and registration requirements.

Good athletic trainers also have a number of personal qualities and skills, including excellent communication skills, strong problem-solving and critical thinking skills, physical fitness and stamina to work long hours and be able to move and transport injured athletes and empathy and compassion.

While it may seem obvious,

it is also important that an athletic trainer have experience in both sports and healthcare. They need to stay physically fit and maintain a healthy lifestyle so they can perform the job and set a good example.

CAREER EVOLUTIONS

There are several areas where the job of athletic trainer has been expanding beyond its traditional scope, something that is requiring some athletic trainers to get new training and skills. In some cases, it is because states have changed their requirements and now allow athletic trainers to do things that were once performed only by doctors, such as concussion assessment and treatment.

There is also a growing conversation about mental health in sports and athletic trainers are part of this conversation. Some are being called upon to provide mental health services, but this requires specific training and resources that haven't traditionally been a part of athletic trainer backgrounds.

Another issue is that many states have different licensing requirements which can cause challenges when athletic trainers travel across state lines with sport teams. These are issues still being worked out, but some athletic trainers are seeking out licensing in multiple states.

However, for those looking for an exciting and growing health care career, athletic trainer offers a lot of possibilities.

Help Patients With Disorders

The more we learn about genetic disorders, the more people request and receive genetic testing to figure out how much risk they have for a wide range of diseases. Genetic testing is becoming more widely available and research in the field has been advancing rapidly.

This has made the job of genetic counselor increase in demand much faster than the average for all occupations, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

What do genetic counselors do? They meet with individuals and families to assess their risk of genetic disorders, provide information about the condition and its inheritance patterns, discuss and provide testing options and provide emotional support and guidance.

PREPARATION AND SKILLS

Anyone who wishes to become a genetic counselor needs a strong background in genetics, counseling and medical ethics. This typically requires a master's degree in genetic counseling.



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Once the degree is earned, would-be genetic counselors in the U.S. have to earn certification from the American Board of Genetic Counseling (AGBC). The AGBC requires that those pursuing certification have specific education and training requirements and pass their exam. In some

states, genetic counselors must be licensed.

Genetic counselors must be good communicators. They will often have to explain complex concepts to people who have little understanding of science or genetics. They should be good listeners who can feel and express empathy

with their patients.

It helps to have good analytical skills to interpret complex genetic data and integrate it with a patient's medical history. Good genetic counselors can identify trends, patterns and potential risk factors.

Other important skills include ethical decision-making,

teamwork, attention to detail, cultural competence and a willingness to engage in lifelong learning.

ENVIRONMENT

There are many different places that hire genetic counselors, including hospitals, clinics, research laboratories and private practices. The work environment is usually a collaborative one with genetic counselors being part of a team that might include physicians, geneticists and other health care professionals.

Because the field is rapidly growing, there is typically a fair amount of job security.

There are some challenges associated with the field. Genetic counselors often work with patients and families who are dealing with difficult emotional issues, such as the diagnosis of a genetic disorder or the risk of passing on a genetic condition to their children. This can take an emotional toll on genetic counselors and they must engage in self-care.

Many genetic counselors also face heavy workloads with a lot of patients to see and much paperwork to complete. Genetic counselors must stay on top of legal and ethical issues such as informed consent, confidentiality and access to genetic information.

In a field that is constantly growing, genetic counselors can enjoy a stable career if they have the right mix of scientific knowledge, interpersonal skills and ethical decision-making abilities.

Mix Health Care and Technology

Sometimes health care careers overlap with other industries, such as one of the fastest growing industries in two segments — health informatics, which involves both health care and information technology. There is a high demand for professionals who have the knowledge and skills needed to manage both health care data and technology.

Northwestern University points out that since it is such a new field, there is a shortage of professionals who have the necessary qualifications, which makes this a field with competitive salaries and a lot of job security.

Health informatics improves the efficiency and effectiveness of health care delivery. It uses technology to manage and analyze health care data with the goal of improving patient outcomes, reducing costs and increasing access to care.

COMMON APPLICATIONS

Health informatic professionals handle several differ-



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ent kinds of applications and systems. Some examples include:

- **Electronic health records:** Digital versions of patient medical records that health care providers and patients can access. They allow for easy sharing of information which can improve care coordination and reduce medical errors.

- **Clinical Decision Support Systems:** CDSSs are software tools that help health care providers make clinical decisions by providing them with evidence-based guidelines and recommendations. They help reduce medical errors and improve patient outcomes.

- **Telemedicine:** These

applications let doctors and other health care professionals deliver services remotely. They allow for consultations and remote monitoring of patients.

- **Health Information Exchange:** These networks allow for the sharing of patient information between health care providers. This improves care coordination and reduces duplicate tests and procedures.

- **Data Analytics:** These advance software tools analyze large amounts of health care data to identify patterns, trends and opportunities for improvement. They help organizations improve care quali-

ty, reduce costs and identify areas where they can make process improvements.

CAREERS IN HEALTH INFORMATICS

There are a growing number of health informatics careers. Northeastern provides several titles and descriptions of what they do:

- **Health informatics specialist.** This is a catch-all title to describe work done in health informatics. It's usually an early career title describing someone who works with patient records and data in a health care setting.

- **Clinical informatics analyst.** These professionals com-

pile and analyze health care data — of which a lot has been collected over recent years. They use that analysis to make suggestions for how the health care organization can adjust their policies, process and procedures to improve patient outcomes. They identify issues and what might be causing them based on the data.

- **Health informatics consultant.** These professionals typically work on a contract basis to advise a healthcare organization on data-related questions, challenges and initiatives. They typically help set up informatic systems and teams.

- **EHR/EMR implementation managers.** These professionals have deep expertise in designing, implementing and optimizing software that handles electronic health records (EHR) — sometimes called electronic medical records (EMR). They set up templates, recommend software enhancements and train others in using the software.

- **Health information technology project manager.** These project managers focus on health informatics projects. They initiate, plan, execute, monitor and close projects.

- **Chief medical information officer.** This executive oversees everything in a health care organization related to health informatics and patient records. They are responsible for overall strategic plans and setting up long-term IT infrastructure.

Caring For Spiritual Needs

Caring for patients takes many forms. While most people think of doctors and nurses when they think about health care careers, there are also professionals in hospital and health care facilities whose job is take care of the spiritual needs of patients and their families.

Hospital chaplains are religious or spiritual leaders who provide emotional and spiritual support to patients, their families and hospital staff. They offer comfort, guidance and prayer to individuals who are facing illness, injury or end-of-life situations.

QUALIFICATIONS

Most hospital chaplains have a graduate degree in theology or divinity and many are ordained clergy members. However, many are able to practice with just a bachelor's degree in religious studies.

Many hospital chaplains complete specialized training in clinical pastoral education (CPE), which prepares them to work in health care settings and informs them about some of the specific situations they will face.

DUTIES

Hospital chaplains may be asked to offer prayer or spiritual guidance, listen to patients and families, provide comfort and support during end-of-life situations and to help patients and families navigate difficult medical decisions.

They may make rounds the same way that doctors do, though some wait until they are called upon by the patient or family. Often they are trained in providing end-of-life rituals from a number of dif-

ferent faiths. These duties might include helping a patient resolve any remaining conflicts they have with others or helping them highlight the positive effect of their life. Chaplains may sit with a person during the final moments of their life.

Sometimes, hospital chaplains conduct worship services in the hospital or facility's chapel. Others provide education or seminars on such topics as grieving, dealing with terminal illness and spiritual topics.

They also work closely with

healthcare providers, either to help them process trauma they face and depression they experience or as a partner in providing holistic care for patients.

Chaplains most commonly work in hospitals, but are also employed by hospices, nursing homes and in other health care settings. Within a hospital, they may be deployed to emergency rooms, intensive care units, oncology departments or pediatric units.

Because they are often needed in emergency situations,

they may be on-call and have to work evenings, weekends or holidays depending on the needs of patients.

INTER-FAITH DUTIES

Many hospital chaplains are trained to support people of different religious or spiritual backgrounds. They provide spiritual care to patients, families and staff of various faiths, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and others.

To successfully navigate interfaith care, hospital chaplains must have a deep understanding of different faith traditions and beliefs, and an ability to communicate effectively with individuals of different backgrounds. They may provide spiritual support, such as prayer, meditation or listening.

Some health care organizations may employ chaplains from specific faith traditions in addition to providing interfaith chaplaincy services. This allows patients and families to receive spiritual support from a chaplain who shares their faith and can provide guidance and support specific to their religious beliefs.

Hospital chaplaincy can be a rewarding career for individuals who are passionate about providing emotional and spiritual support to those in need. Hospital chaplains play an important role in health care, providing comfort and guidance to patients, families and health care providers in some of the most challenging and memorable moments of their lives.



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Drawing Blood Samples

If you are interested in a health care career and have a knack for putting people at ease while working with steady, capable hands, you might want to consider the role of phlebotomy technician.

A phlebotomy technician draws blood from patients either as part of laboratory testing or for blood donations. They ensure that accurate blood samples are collected to help doctors and nurses make accurate diagnoses.

Because many people are afraid of needles or uncomfortable with the sight of blood, phlebotomy technicians are taught to help ease patient fears and make the process as comfortable as possible.

They are also trained in infection control measures, an important task to prevent the spread of bloodborne pathogens. They ensure equipment is properly sterilized and disposed of after use.

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND WORK ENVIRONMENT

Phlebotomy technicians usually earn a certificate or diploma in phlebotomy. It typically includes classroom instruction and hands-on training in blood



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collection techniques. They are taught medical terminology, anatomy and physiology.

They often work in health care settings such as hospitals, clinics, blood banks or research laboratories. They also might work in outpatient clinics, emergency departments or long-term care facilities.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the job

outlook for phlebotomy technicians will grow by 17% over the next decade.

JOB CHANGES

The job of phlebotomy technician has changed some in recent years due to advances in technology and changes in health care delivery. And like every other health care occupation, it has been affected by

the COVID-19 pandemic.

Technological advances have made the blood collection process safer and more efficient. Vein visualization devices use infrared light to help phlebotomy technicians locate veins and improve the accuracy of blood draws. Likewise, improved electronic medical records systems allow phlebotomy technicians to quickly and

easily access patient information.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute (CLSI) have increased regulation around blood collection and safety, specifically the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) by health care workers and guidelines for collecting and handling blood specimens.

Health care facilities have implemented new safety protocols in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as a way of controlling its spread. These protocols have affected phlebotomy technicians. While most testing is done nasally, the increased testing has led to an increased demand for phlebotomy technicians.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

If you're considering phlebotomy technician as a career, know that you will need a combination of technical skills, interpersonal skills and personal qualities. They range from attention to detail, good communication skills, empathy and compassion, physical stamina, technical skills, dependability, reliability, attention to safety and professionalism.

If this describes you — if you are detail-oriented, compassionate, physically capable, technically skilled and committed to providing high-quality patient care in a safe and professional manner — then this could be the career for you.

Help People Breathe Easier

Respiratory health has never been more in the news and on the public's mind than since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The spread of COVID-19 has increased the demand for respiratory therapists who specialize in the treatment of patients with respiratory disorders such as COVID-19, flu, bronchitis, COPD, asthma, pneumonia, cystic fibrosis, sleep apnea, lung cancer, emphysema and pulmonary diseases.

Respiratory therapists evaluate patients' respiratory function, develop treatment plans (medications, oxygen therapy, chest physiotherapy, or ventilators), administer therapies, monitor treatment responses and educate patients and their families. Respiratory therapists sometimes have to respond to emergency situations when patients experience cardiac arrests or respiratory failure. They're trained to perform intubation, CPR and other emergency procedures.

REQUIREMENTS, SKILLS AND PREPARATION

Respiratory therapists need a strong understanding of respiratory physiology, excellent communication skills and the ability to work collaboratively with other healthcare



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professionals.

To become a respiratory therapist, you need to complete an accredited respiratory therapy program — either a two-year associate's degree or a four-year bachelor's degree program. You'll typically have to take classes in anatomy, physiology, pharmacology and patient care. You'll then have to participate in clinical rotations.

After you've earned a degree, you'll need to get a license or certification, with requirements varying by state. Respiratory therapists need to complete continuing education courses on a regular basis.

In addition to the knowledge of respiratory physiology and the skills of respiratory therapy obtained while earning a degree and certification, respiratory therapists need to have good communication skills, problem-solving skills, physical stamina, compassion and empathy and an ability to work under pressure.

RECENT CHANGES

Since the onset of the pandemic, there has been a significant increase in demand for respiratory therapists. They are needed to care for patients who have respiratory

complications from COVID-19, including those who require mechanical ventilation. Because they are on the front line of working with the pandemic, they have increased requirements for using personal protective equipment including masks, gloves and gowns.

Some states have expanded the scope of practice for respiratory therapists, calling upon them to perform additional procedures and therapies such as proning and high-flow oxygen therapy.

With the shift toward telemedicine during the pandem-

ic, respiratory therapists are now providing virtual care and consultations to patients, particularly those who are at high risk for COVID-19.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Many people in the profession find it rewarding to help patients breathe easier and improve their quality of life — to say nothing of the lives they save.

The field is one in which there is a great deal of job growth which means there are many opportunities and a fair amount of job security. There is some flexibility in the career. Respiratory therapists work in hospitals, clinics, nursing homes and patient homes. For those who like team environments, respiratory therapists work closely with doctors, nurses and other health care professionals to provide comprehensive care for patients.

On the downside, it is a job that can be emotionally challenging, especially when working with critically ill patients. It is very physically demanding. The job often comes with irregular hours including weekends, nights and holidays.

Also, as was seen during the pandemic, respiratory therapists are front-line workers who are at increased risk of exposure to infectious diseases.

Being a respiratory therapist can be rewarding and fulfilling for those with a passion for helping others and an interest in respiratory care.

Make Programs Run Smoothly

While telehealth has been around for a while, it became far more popular during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, a variety of occupations related to telehealth have opened up.

While many healthcare professionals simply added telehealth duties, larger organizations can have telehealth coordinators. The Bureau of Labor Statistics classifies telehealth coordinators as health care social workers and project that their employment over the next 10 years will grow faster than the average for all occupations.

Telemedicine coordinators primarily have an administrative job, one where they support both clinical and non-clinical staff while making sure quality standards for patients are being met.

The Center for Care Innovations says health care organizations need telehealth coordinators for three reasons:

One, they free up the time of medical, financial and operational leadership. Two, they can improve telehealth workflows by developing new policies and procedures. Three, they can engage patients to reduce no-show rates.



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QUALIFICATIONS

Universities are starting to offer bachelor's, master's and certifications in telehealth specialties, but there are a variety of ways to qualify for the job. Telehealth coordinators typically have a bachelor's degree in health care administration, public health, nursing or a related field. They may also have experience working in other health care settings.

Skills needed for this position are a comfort with technology, along with strong communication and organizational skills.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Telehealth coordinators are responsible for managing and coordinating telemedicine programs within health care organizations.

Duties will vary depending

on the size of the organization, the demographics of its patients and the extent of its telemedicine program. However, some duties may include overseeing the implementation of telemedicine systems and ensuring they run smoothly, training providers on how to use the technology, ensuring patient data is stored properly and securely, coordinating schedules and

appointments, managing telehealth equipment, troubleshooting telehealth equipment, and evaluating the effectiveness of programs and making recommendations for improvement.

FACILITATING CHANGE

Telehealth coordinators may also be involved in helping the program gain acceptance and ensuring that it is something that fits in with the overall mission of the organization.

Because telehealth is a growing field, coordinators often must make policies as they go, policies that have to comply with legal and regulatory requirements. They may be called upon to ensure the telehealth program meets all regulations related to patient privacy and security, licensing and credentialing of health care policies and reimbursement policies.

They may also be called upon to provide education and support to providers who resist using technology because they are unfamiliar with it or prefer face-to-face interactions with patients. Coordinators must be able to address concerns and promote the benefits of telemedicine. They may also have the same duties with patients who resist the change represented by telemedicine.

Telehealth coordinators play an important role in expanding access to health care services, improving patient outcomes and reducing costs.