

## Nursing

**What Registered Nurses Do** Registered nurses (RNs) provide and coordinate patient care, educate patients and the public about various health conditions, and provide advice and emotional support to patients and their family members.

### Duties

- Give patients' medical histories and symptoms
- Record patients medicines and treatments
- Set up plans for patients' care or contribute to existing plans
- Observe patients and record the observations
- Consult with doctors and other healthcare professionals
- Operate and monitor medical equipment
- Help perform diagnostic tests and analyze results
- Teach patients and their families how to manage their illnesses or injuries
- Explain what to do at home after treatment

Some registered nurses oversee licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and aides. Most registered nurses work as part of a team with physicians and other healthcare specialists.

Some nurses have jobs in which they do not work directly with patients, but they must still have an active registered nurse license. For example, they may work as nurse educators, healthcare consultants, public policy advisors, researchers, hospital administrators, salespeople for pharmaceutical and medical supply companies, or as medical writers and editors.

Registered nurses' duties and titles often depend on where they work and the patients they work with. They can focus on the following specialties:

- A specific health condition, such as a diabetes management nurse who helps patients with diabetes or an oncology nurse who helps cancer patients.
- A specific part of the body, such as a dermatology nurse working with patients who have skin problems.
- A specific group of people, such as a geriatric nurse who works with the elderly or a pediatric nurse who works with children and teens.
- A specific workplace, such as an emergency or trauma nurse who works in a hospital or stand-alone emergency department or a school nurse working in a school rather than in a hospital or doctor's office.

The following list includes just a few other examples of ways that some registered nurses specialize:

**Addiction nurses** care for patients who need help to overcome addictions to alcohol, drugs, tobacco, and other substances.

**Cardiovascular nurses** treat patients with heart disease and people who have had heart surgery.

**Critical care nurses** work in intensive care units in hospitals, providing care to patients with serious, complex, and acute illnesses and injuries that need very close monitoring and treatment.

**Genetics nurses** provide screening, counseling, and treatment of patients with genetic disorders, such as cystic fibrosis and Huntington's disease.

**Neonatology nurses** take care of newborn babies.

**Nephrology nurses** treat patients who have kidney-related health issues caused by diabetes, high blood pressure, substance abuse, or other causes.

**Rehabilitation nurses** care for patients with temporary or permanent disabilities.

**Advanced practice registered nurses** may provide primary and specialty care, and, in most states, they may prescribe medicines. All states have requirements for registered nurses in these four advanced practice roles:

- **Clinical nurse specialists** provide direct patient care and expert consultations in one of many nursing specialties, such as psychiatric-mental health.
- **Nurse anesthetists** provide anesthesia and related care before and after surgical, therapeutic, diagnostic, and obstetrical procedures. They also provide pain management and emergency services.
- **Nurse-midwives** provide care to women, including gynecological exams, family planning advice, prenatal care, assistance in labor and delivery, and care of newborns.
- **Nurse practitioners** serve as primary and specialty care providers, providing a blend of nursing and primary care services to patients and families.

## Work Place

Hospitals: 54%

Physician Offices: 8%

Home Health: 5%

Nursing Homes: 5%

Government, Education, Other: 28%

**Injuries** Registered nurses may spend a lot of time walking, bending, stretching, and standing. They are vulnerable to back injuries because they must often lift and move patients. The work of registered nurses may put them in close contact with people who have infectious diseases, and they often come in contact with potentially harmful and hazardous drugs and other substances. Therefore, registered nurses must follow strict, standardized guidelines to guard against diseases and other dangers, such as radiation, accidental needle sticks, or the chemicals they use to sterilize instruments

**Work Schedules** Because patients in hospitals and nursing care facilities need round-the-clock care, nurses in these settings usually work in rotating shifts, covering all 24 hours. They may work nights, weekends, and holidays. They may also be on call. Nurses who work in offices, schools, and other places that do not provide 24-hour care are more likely to work regular business hours. About 20 percent of registered nurses worked part time.

**Education and Training** Registered nurses usually take one of three education paths: a bachelor's of science degree in nursing (BSN), an associate's degree in nursing, or a diploma from an approved nursing program. Registered nurses must also be licensed.

In all nursing education programs, students take courses in nursing, anatomy, physiology, microbiology, chemistry, nutrition, psychology and other social and behavioral sciences. Programs also include supervised clinical experience in hospital departments such as pediatrics, psychiatry, maternity, and surgery. A number of programs include clinical experience in extended and long-term care facilities, public health departments, home health agencies, or walk-in clinics.

Bachelor's degree programs usually include more training in the physical and social sciences, communication, leadership, and critical thinking, which is becoming more important as nursing practice becomes more complex. They also offer more clinical experience in nonhospital settings. A bachelor's degree or higher is often necessary for administrative positions, research, consulting, and teaching.

Many registered nurses with an associate's degree or diploma find an entry-level position and then take advantage of tuition reimbursement benefits to work toward a BSN by completing an RN-to-BSN program. There are also master's degree programs in nursing, combined bachelor's and master's programs, and programs for those who wish to enter the nursing profession but hold a bachelor's degree in another field.

**Licenses and Certification** In all states, registered nurses must have a nursing license. To become licensed, nurses must graduate from an approved nursing program and pass the National Council Licensure Examination, or NCLEX-RN.

### **Important Qualities**

**Critical-thinking skills** Registered nurses must be able to assess changes in the health state of patients, including when to take corrective action and when to make referrals.

**Compassion** Registered nurses should be caring and sympathetic toward patients.

**Detail oriented** Registered nurses must be responsible and detail oriented because they must make sure that patients get the correct treatments and medicines at the right time.

**Emotional stability** Registered nurses need emotional stability to cope with human suffering, emergencies, and other stresses.

**Organizational skills** Registered nurses often work with multiple patients with various health needs, and organizational skills are critical to ensure the patient is given proper care.

**Patience** Registered nurses should be patient so they can provide quality care under stressful or hectic circumstances.

**Speaking skills** Registered nurses must be able to talk effectively with patients to correctly assess their health conditions. Nurses need to clearly explain how to take medication or give other instructions. They must be able to work in teams with other health professionals and communicate the patients' needs.

**Advancement** Most registered nurses begin as staff nurses in hospitals or community health settings. With experience, good performance, and continuous education they can move to other settings or be promoted to positions with more responsibility.

In management, nurses can advance from assistant unit manager or head nurse to more senior-level administrative roles, such as assistant director, director, vice president, or chief of nursing. Management-level nursing positions require a graduate degree in nursing or health services administration. Administrative positions require leadership, communication and negotiation skills, and good judgment.

Some RNs choose to become advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs). APRNs work independently or in collaboration with physicians. They may provide primary care, and, in most states, they may prescribe medications. APRNs require at least a master's degree. Each state's board of nursing can provide the specific regulations regarding APRNs.

Some nurses move into the business side of healthcare. Their nursing expertise and experience on a healthcare team equip them to manage ambulatory, acute, home-based, and chronic care businesses. Employers—including hospitals, insurance companies, pharmaceutical manufacturers, and managed care organizations, among others—need registered nurses for jobs in health planning and development, marketing, consulting, policy development, and quality assurance. Other nurses work as teachers in colleges and universities.

**Pay** The median annual wage of registered nurses was \$64,690 in May 2010. The median wage is the wage at which half of the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$44,190 and the top 10 percent earned more than \$95,130.

Hospitals: \$66,000

Physician offices: \$62,000

Home Health: \$60,000

Nursing Homes: \$58,000

**Job Outlook** Overall, job opportunities for registered nurses are expected to be excellent. Employers in some parts of the country and in some employment settings report difficulty in attracting and keeping enough registered nurses.

Job opportunities should be excellent, even in hospitals, because of the relatively high turnover of hospital nurses. To attract and keep qualified nurses, hospitals may offer signing bonuses, family-friendly work schedules, or subsidized training.

In physicians' offices and outpatient care centers, registered nurses may face greater competition for positions because these jobs generally offer regular working hours and provide more comfortable working conditions than hospitals.

Generally, registered nurses with at least a bachelor's degree in nursing (BSN) will have better job prospects than those without one. In addition, all four advanced practice registered nurses-clinical nurse specialists, nurse anesthetists, nurse-midwives, and nurse practitioners-will be in high demand, particularly in medically underserved areas such as inner cities and rural areas [**this includes Cumberland, Salem and Gloucester counties**].

**SOURCE:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012-13 Edition*, Registered Nurses, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/registered-nurses.htm> (visited January 7, 2013).

#### Local Nursing Programs:

- Cumberland County College: Associate in Applied Science plus onsite campus for Bachelors or Masters programs through other schools
- Salem County College: Practical Nursing Certificate and Associate in Applied Science
- Gloucester County College: Licensed Practical Nurse to Registered Nurse
- Richard Stockton College: Registered Nurse to Bachelor Science in Nursing and Master Science in Nursing
- Rowan University: Registered Nurse to Bachelor of Science in Nursing