Hot Jobs in Health Care

If you like science and enjoy helping people, there may be a job for you in the Health Science Career Cluster.

By Diana K. Serquina

The demand for certain health-care workers is growing faster than the supply. There are more people needing more health care, and the numbers will only grow. Nevertheless, the public still expects high-quality care.

Geriatric Care

One of the reasons for the demand for health-care workers is the aging baby boomer generation. As a result, geriatric care (care of the elderly) is one of the areas experiencing rapid growth. High demand in that field is likely to continue over the next 30 years.

(See picture, "Health Care Careers: Geriatric Care.")

Julie Kemp-Havican is a social worker/special needs unit coordinator at the Marquette County Medical Care Facility in Ishpeming, Michigan. "I oversee a 30-bed special needs unit designed for people in the middle stages of Alzheimer's disease or related dementia," Kemp-Havican says. "Our goal is to provide a stimulating, homelike environment to individuals who are too confused to live independently, but who are not yet ready for a traditional nursing home."

Kemp-Havican screens candidates for the unit. Once they are admitted, she evaluates their needs and develops care plans for them. As their disease progresses, she monitors their ongoing eligibility for the unit. "I also train all staff in dementia care skills and supervise the staff and the operation of the unit," she says.

Her favorite part of the job is the time she spends with residents. The staff involves residents in activities like cooking, arts and crafts, and music. They also spend time reminiscing with residents. "It is truly rewarding because those who you work with and help are very grateful to you," Kemp-Havican says.

Nursing

The U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) says nursing is the largest health-care profession. It is also one of the 10 fields projected to have the most new jobs.

Pam Webb is a registered nurse (R.N.) and also has a certification in infection control (CIC). She is the infection control coordinator at Benefis Healthcare, a hospital in Great Falls, Montana. "It's an art, being a nurse," Webb says. "It's using your scientific knowledge and balancing it with your communication and organizational skills."

Webb earned her bachelor's degree in nursing from Montana State University. She is now working on a master's degree in public health from the University of Washington.

She keeps patients healthier by preventing infections. That means keeping patients, employees, and visitors from getting infections that can then spread among patients.

"I make rounds in the hospital, identify patients who have health-care-associated infections, and I look for trends or patterns of infection," Webb says. "Prevention efforts are very critical to my daily role, so that our patients have the best possible outcomes."

There are a wide range of specialties within nursing. Nurses can work in hospitals, doctors' offices, or other medical settings. They can work with children, the elderly, or patients of all ages.

Webb has worked in many different settings as a nurse. Those areas include coronary care, coronary intensive care, and surgical intensive care. She has also worked as a traveling nurse in hospitals around the country.

Webb says that her love of science helped her choose to go into nursing. She also enjoys using her communication and people skills in her job. "Nursing as a profession has been the best possible career I ever could have chosen for myself," says Webb. "I've had opportunities presented to me that I never would have had otherwise, in any other profession."

Dental Care

As people live longer and keep their own teeth longer, the need for dental care workers is rising. Dental hygiene is one of the 30 fastest growing careers, according to the BLS.

(See picture, "Health Care Careers: Dental Hygienist.")

"A lot of people think hygiene is just cleaning teeth," says Angelina Nichols, a dental hygienist in Lima, Ohio. The practice she works in focuses on nonsurgical periodontal (having to do with the tissue and structures that support the teeth) therapy, a fairly new area of treatment.

"We have an instrument called a probe, and we measure the space in between where the gums attach to the teeth," explains Nichols. "Once that space gets deeper, the bacteria get down into it and will start to destroy the bone, so a lot of our adult therapy is getting under the gums and keeping the teeth clean there. It's trying to keep patients' oral health without surgery, because it can get bad enough that they need gum surgery or bone grafting."

http://discoverer.prod.siris.com/discoweb/disco/do/article?urn=um%3Asirs%3AUS%3BARTICLE%3BART%3B0000186266
Dental hygienists are only required to have an associate’s degree. However, Nichols suggests getting a bachelor’s degree to allow career growth, including the option of teaching.

Nichols enjoys feeling that her work makes a difference. “I think we’re changing the way young adults and middle-aged adults feel about keeping their teeth,” she says. She explains that while older people accept dentures as a normal part of aging, today’s middle-aged population is learning that they can keep their teeth for a lifetime.

Physical Therapy

Physical therapists are also in high demand. They help people recover from injury or illness. The need for their services is higher among older patients, whose numbers are growing as the population ages.

(See picture, "Health Care Careers: Physical Therapist.")

Penny Reid, a registered physical therapist, works at St. Luke’s Rehabilitation Institute in Spokane, Washington. She treats patients with spinal cord injuries or orthopedic problems. Many people get outpatient physical therapy, but Reid’s clients are inpatients at St. Luke’s.

She spends six to seven hours a day in direct patient care. That includes helping patients with exercise programs and other therapy. The rest of her time is spent on tasks like paperwork and staff meetings. She also supervises physical therapy students working as interns at St. Luke’s.

Patient care is her favorite part of the job. "I wanted to work in a medical field, and chose not to go into nursing," Reid says. "I enjoy the patient interaction. It’s very rewarding to help people in a tangible way to get back into living their lives." She also says that the career pays well, and offers a wide range of job choices.

Reid has a bachelor’s degree in physical therapy, and a master’s in applied behavioral sciences. Currently, a career in physical therapy requires only a bachelor’s degree. However, Reid says that is changing. “Most educational programs now graduate their students with a master’s in physical therapy, and many are moving toward a doctor of physical therapy (DPT),” says Reid. “In the next several years, all new graduates will likely have a DPT at the time they enter the workforce.”

Is Health Care the Field for You?

Are you wondering if a job in the Health Science Career Cluster is right for you? If you can check off most or all of these items, it may be! (Some items apply to health care in general, while others are more career-specific.)

- I am interested in the sciences, such as biology.
- I enjoy working with people.
- I show respect for people of all ages, backgrounds, and conditions.
- I am strong enough to lift and support patients.
- I am nurturing and compassionate.
- I am patient.
- I have strong observation and analytical skills.
- I am able to communicate my findings and recommendations.

Hot Jobs Chart

Whether you want to work in a hospital, a small clinic, or private practice, if you enjoy science and working with people, you can find a career in the growing field of health sciences. Here are just a few of the options.

Jobs and Responsibilities

**Gerontology social workers** provide services for senior citizens, including running support groups for family caregivers or for the adult children of aging parents; help elderly people or their family members make decisions about housing, transportation, and long-term care issues; coordinate and monitor services for the elderly.

**Minimum Education:** Bachelor’s degree

**Salary**

Starting: $20,120

Median: $26,780

**Registered nurses** provide direct patient care and patient education, and perform other duties that vary by specific job.

**Minimum Education:** State nursing license; associate’s or bachelor’s degree, depending on state

**Salary**

Starting: $31,890

Median: $44,840

**Dental hygienists** examine and clean patients’ teeth, teach patients how to care for their teeth and gums, and provide other preventive dental and periodontal care.

**Minimum Education:** Associate’s degree and state license

**Salary**

Starting: $15.53/hr

Median: $24.68/hr
Physical therapists use exercise and other treatments to help patients with injuries or illnesses to regain function and mobility, relieve pain, and prevent or limit permanent physical disabilities.

Minimum Education: Bachelor's degree and state licensure

Salary*
Starting: $38,510
Median: $54,810

*Salaries are approximate and may vary depending on experience and place of employment.

• Source: Occupational Outlook Handbook

Review/Discuss

• What are some of the hot jobs in health care? (geriatric care, nursing, physical therapist, and dental care)

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