



Registered Nurse

Registered Nurses RNs

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

Registered nurses typically do the following:

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

Most registered nurses work as part of a team with [physicians](#) and other healthcare specialists. Some registered nurses oversee [licensed practical nurses](#), [nursing assistants](#), and [home health aides](#).

Registered nurses' duties and titles often depend on where they work and the patients they work with. For example, an oncology nurse may work with cancer patients or a geriatric nurse may work with elderly patients. Some registered nurses combine one or more areas of practice. For example, a pediatric oncology nurse works with children and teens who have cancer.

Many possibilities for working with specific patient groups exist. The following list includes just a *few* examples:

- **Addiction nurses** care for patients who need help to overcome addictions to alcohol, drugs, and other substances.
- **Cardiovascular nurses** care for 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 for patients with genetic disorders, such as cystic fibrosis.
- **Neonatology nurses** take care of newborn babies.
- **Nephrology nurses** care for patients who have kidney-related health issues stemming from diabetes, high blood pressure, substance abuse, or other causes.
- **Rehabilitation nurses** care for patients with temporary or permanent disabilities.

Registered nurses may work to promote public health, by educating people on warning signs and symptoms of disease or managing chronic health conditions. They may also run health screenings, immunization clinics, blood drives, or other community outreach programs. Other nurses staff the health clinics in schools.

Some nurses 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.

Clinical nurse specialists (CNSs) are a type of advanced practice registered nurse (APRN). They provide direct patient care in one of many nursing specialties, such as psychiatric-mental health or pediatrics. CNSs also provide indirect care, by working with other nurses and various other staff to improve the quality of care that patients receive. They often serve in leadership roles and may educate and advise other nursing staff. CNSs also may conduct research and may advocate for certain policies.

Other examples of advanced practice registered nurses (APRN)

<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/nurse-anesthetists-nurse-midwives-and-nurse-practitioners.htm#tab-1> include:

- **Nurse Anesthetists**
- **Nurse Midwives**
- **Nurse Practitioners**

IMPORTANT qualities

- **Critical-thinking skills.** Registered nurses must be able to assess changes in the health status of patients, including determining when to take corrective action and when to make referrals.
- **Communication skills.** Registered nurses must be able to communicate effectively with patients in order to understand their concerns and assess their health conditions. Nurses need to explain instructions, such as how to take medication, clearly. They must be able to work in teams with other health professionals and communicate the patients' needs.
- **Compassion.** Registered nurses should be caring and empathetic when caring for 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 resilience and the ability to manage their emotions to cope with human suffering, emergencies, and other stresses.
- **Organizational skills.** Nurses often work with multiple patients with various health needs. Organizational skills are critical to ensure that each patient is given appropriate care.
- **Physical stamina.** Nurses should be comfortable performing physical tasks, such as moving patients. They may be on their feet for most of their shift.

Working Conditions

Registered nurses held about 3 million jobs in 2016. The industries that employed the most registered nurses were as follows:

Hospitals; state, local, and private	61%
Ambulatory healthcare services	18
Nursing and residential care facilities	7
Government	5
Educational services; state, local, and private	3

Registered nurses are the largest healthcare occupation. They work in hospitals, physicians' offices, home healthcare services, and nursing care facilities. Others work in schools or outpatient clinics, or serve in the military. Home health and public health nurses travel to patients' homes, schools, community centers, and other sites.

Some nurses move frequently, traveling in the United States and throughout the world to help care for patients in places where there are not enough healthcare workers.

Injuries and Illnesses

Registered nurses may spend a lot of time walking, bending, stretching, and standing. They are vulnerable to back injuries, because they often must lift and move patients.

In addition, the work of registered nurses may put them in close contact with people who have infectious diseases, and they frequently 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 used to create a sterile and clean environment.

Work Schedules

Because patients in hospitals and nursing care facilities need round-the-clock care, nurses in these settings usually work in shifts, covering all 24 hours. They may work nights, weekends, and holidays. They also may 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.

Education

Quick Facts

- There are three educational paths to becoming a registered nurse (RN): **Associate Degree "ADN"** (2 year community college program) **OR Bachelor's Degree "BSN"** (4 year university program) or **Diploma** (hospital based program)
- Graduates from all programs take the same state licensure examination (NCLEX-RN) to become a registered nurse (RN) - the core nursing content is the same for both programs.
- In 2008, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and the Institute of Medicine (IOM) launched a two-year initiative to respond to the need to assess and transform the nursing profession. Their purpose was to produce a report that would make recommendations for the future of nursing.
- In October 2010 the Institute of Medicine published "The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health <http://www.iom.edu/nursing>. The committee developed four key messages, one of which reads "*Nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression.*"
- Prompted by this report, the RWJF and the American Association of Retired People (AARP) partnered to establish *The Future of Nursing: Campaign for Action*, aimed at improving the health of Americans by transforming the nursing profession, using the IOM report as a framework. The campaign has helped form action coalitions - groups of nurses and other health care providers, employers, patients, and others - in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Most of these groups have focused on implementing the IOM's recommendation that **80% of the nursing workforce have a BSN degree by 2020.**
- Consequently, hospitals and other health care facilities are encouraging registered nurses to seek their BSN rather than ending their education with an ADN or Diploma.
- Colleges and universities across the country have responded to this demand by offering RN-BSN and other educational progression tracks for licensed RN's to advance their education. These RN-BSN & other progression tracks are often delivered in an on-line format, allowing nurses to be employed while pursuing advanced nursing degrees.

In all nursing education programs, students take courses in anatomy, physiology, microbiology, chemistry, nutrition, psychology, and other social and behavioral sciences, as well as in liberal arts. BSN programs typically take 4 years to complete; ADN and diploma programs usually take 2 to 3 years to complete. All programs include supervised clinical experience.

Bachelor's degree programs usually include additional education in the physical and social sciences, communication, leadership, and critical thinking. These programs also offer more clinical experience in nonhospital settings. A bachelor's degree or higher is often necessary for administrative positions, research, consulting, and teaching.

Generally, licensed graduates of any of the three types of education programs (bachelor's, associate's, or diploma) qualify for entry-level positions as a staff nurse. However, employers—particularly those in hospitals—may require a bachelor's degree.

Many registered nurses with an ADN or diploma choose to go back to school to earn a bachelor's degree through an RN-to-BSN program. There are also master's degree programs in nursing, combined bachelor's and master's programs, and accelerated programs for those who wish to enter the nursing profession and already hold a bachelor's degree in another field. Some employers offer tuition reimbursement.

Clinical nurse specialists (CNSs) must earn a master's degree in nursing and typically already have 1 or more years of work experience as an RN or in a related field. CNSs who conduct research typically need a doctoral degree.

Average Salary Range

The median annual wage for registered nurses was \$70,000 in May 2017. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$48,690, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$104,100. In May 2017, the median annual wages for registered nurses in the top industries in which they worked were as follows:

Government	\$75,900
Hospitals; state, local, and private	72,070
Ambulatory healthcare services	66,300
Nursing and residential care facilities	62,320
Educational services; state, local, and private	60,300

Employers may offer flexible work schedules, childcare, educational benefits, and bonuses.

Because patients in hospitals and nursing care facilities need round-the-clock care, nurses in these settings usually work in shifts, covering all 24 hours. They may work nights, weekends, and holidays. They may be on call, which means that they are on duty and must be available to work on short notice. Nurses who work in offices, schools, and other places that do not provide 24-hour care are more likely to work regular business hours.

Job Outlook

Employment of registered nurses is projected to grow **15 percent** from 2016 to 2026, much faster than the average for all occupations. Growth will occur for a number of reasons:

- Demand for healthcare services will increase because of the aging population, given that older people typically have more medical problems than younger people. Nurses also will be needed to educate and care for patients with various chronic conditions, such as arthritis, dementia, diabetes, and obesity.
- In addition, the number of individuals who have access to health insurance is expected to continue to increase because of federal health insurance reform. People who previously were uninsured or found treatment to be cost prohibitive will obtain health insurance and have access to primary and preventive care services. More nurses will be needed to care for these patients in offices of physicians, clinics, and other ambulatory care settings.

The financial pressure on hospitals to discharge patients as soon as possible may result in more people being admitted to long-term care facilities and outpatient care centers, and greater need for healthcare at home. Job growth is expected in facilities that provide long-term rehabilitation for stroke and head injury patients, and in facilities that treat people with Alzheimer's disease. In addition, because many older people prefer to be treated at home or in residential care facilities, registered nurses will be in demand in those settings.

Growth also is expected to be faster than average in outpatient care centers, where patients do not stay overnight, such as those which provide same-day chemotherapy, rehabilitation, and surgery. In addition, an increased number of procedures, as well as more sophisticated procedures previously done only in hospitals, are being performed in ambulatory care settings and physicians' offices.

U.S. News & World Report lists RN's as number 18 in "The 25 Best Jobs of 2018."

<https://money.usnews.com/money/careers/slideshows/the-25-best-jobs>

Job Prospects

Overall, job opportunities for registered nurses are expected to be good. However, the supply of new nurses entering the labor market has increased in recent years. This increase has resulted in competition for jobs in some areas of the country. Generally, registered nurses with a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing (BSN) will have better job prospects than those without one. Employers also may prefer candidates who have some related work experience.

Job opportunities should be good because of the need to replace workers who retire over the coming decade and because of the growing number of people with access to healthcare services.

CONTACTS FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about registered nurses, including credentialing, visit:

[American Nurses Association](#)

For more information about nursing education and being a registered nurse, visit:

[American Society of Registered Nurses](#)

[Johnson & Johnson, Discover Nursing](#)

[National League for Nursing](#)

[National Student Nurses Association](#)

For more information about undergraduate and graduate nursing education, nursing career options, and financial aid, visit:

[American Association of Colleges of Nursing](#)

For more information about the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN) and a list of individual state boards of nursing, visit:

[National Council of State Boards of Nursing](#)

For more information about clinical nurse specialists, including a list of accredited programs, visit

[National Association of Clinical Nurse Specialists](#)

[O*NET](#)

[Acute Care Nurses](#)

[Advanced Practice Psychiatric Nurses](#)

[Clinical Nurse Specialists](#)

[Critical Care Nurses](#)

[Registered Nurses](#)

Reference

- Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/registered-nurses.htm> (visited *June 15, 2018*).