



Health  
Care  
Careers

# What Is a Patient Advocate?

Patient advocates are health care personnel who help guide a patient through the health care system.

They help patients and their families communicate with health care providers and help them get the information they need to make decisions about their plan of treatment. They may also help patients set appointments for doctor's visits and medical tests, get financial, legal and social help, and help patients navigate insurance companies and others who help decide their health care needs.

## WHAT TRAINING WILL I NEED?

Unlike doctors and nurses, there's no set career path to becoming a patient advocate, Western Governors University says. There are no state or national standards for patient advocates, but there are some degrees that can help you get relevant experience and develop a skill set for success.

WGU recommends taking courses in social work, health and human services, nursing, health care management and health information management. Some universities also offer degrees such as a master's of business administration with a concentration in health care management. If you already have a master's, WGU recommends looking into post-graduate certifications such as those



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in nursing leadership and management.

## WHAT SKILLS SHOULD I HAVE?

Like most career paths, not all patient advocate skills are learned in the classroom. If you enjoy any of the following skills

or are good at them, consider patient advocacy as the right health care career for you.

**Advocacy skills.** Be able to effectively communicate, negotiate, plan, research and act in the best interest of your patients and their families. This means you should be a strong

verbal and written communicator who can take complex information and put it into terms that are easily understood. You should be a solid negotiator.

**Attention to detail.** Patient advocacy involves reading lots of documentation and making sure that all the information is

accurate and complete. You need to quickly identify errors and take action to fix them and be able to keep information neatly organized.

It helps to be a problem-solver who's able to step in and resolve disputes, billing issues and misunderstandings.

# Jobs in a Pharmacy

We're familiar with the pharmacist — the person in a pharmacy responsible for filling and dispensing our prescriptions. They're an important part of any health care team.

There are also many supporting roles in a pharmacy. Here are a few to consider.

## PHARMACY CLERK

A pharmacy clerk fills some prescriptions, works at the register and updates patient information records. They may also be responsible for making sure the pharmacy area is clean and neatly arranged. A pharmacy clerk may also help the pharmacist order stock and enter it into inventory.

## PHARMACY DISPENSER

A pharmacy dispenser selects drugs or devices according to a patient's prescription and puts them in a suitably labeled container. They may update the patient's personal and insurance information, manage inventory, place orders, arrange merchandise, process paperwork and communicate with insurance companies.

## PHARMACY TECHNICIAN

A pharmacy technician under a licensed pharmacist helps manage the pharmacy, including ordering medica-



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tions, keeping the shelves clean and well-stocked, filling prescriptions, checking for drug allergies and other adverse interactions and talking to patients about their health concerns.

## NUCLEAR PHARMACISTS

Nuclear pharmacists are responsible for preparing, testing and dispensing radiopharmaceuticals for diagnos-

ing and treating different types of cancers and other diseases. In addition to the roles of a regular pharmacist, nuclear pharmacists may manage laboratory procedures and testing equipment and supervise the handling, packaging and delivery of radiopharmaceuticals. It is especially important that nuclear pharmacists keep their work environment safe

and that any waste products are properly disposed of. Nuclear pharmacists must keep records up to date and organized and make sure the pharmacy complies with state and federal regulations.

## PHARMACY MANAGER

A pharmacy manager is in charge of the pharmacy's daily operations. They oversee customer service, handle

medications and maintain a patient database.

Pharmacy managers may consult with medical professionals about filling prescriptions and talk to patients about taking their medications and any possible side effects. They suggest over-the-counter medications for minor ailments and ensure that department policies and regulations are followed.

# How to Become a Paramedic

Paramedics respond to emergency calls and are often the first member of the health care team a patient sees, especially in an emergency.

They provide medical attention, including advanced life support, and transport patients to appropriate medical facilities.

## PARAMEDICS AREN'T EMTS

Paramedics aren't just emergency medical technicians. They have more training and, therefore, more advanced responsibilities. They can provide more advanced medical treatment, such as giving injections, starting IV medications and using advanced airway management devices to help patients breathe.

## COMMON DUTIES

Some common responsibilities of paramedics include responding to emergency calls; driving ambulances and other emergency vehicles; providing medical treatments such as using a defibrillator, giving medications, starting IVs, clearing airways and performing emergency tracheotomies. Paramedics may also read and interpret medical tests and equipment and relay patient information to hospital staff and other members of a health care team.



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## TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION

The first step to becoming a paramedic is to become an emergency medical technician certified in basic life support. This will give you a good idea about how you respond in emergency situations and work under pressure. Next, you need to be nationally certified at the EMT level and, in some cases,

even have prior work experience as an EMT. You should then enroll in an emergency medical technician-paramedic degree certification or associate degree program. Finally, you must be licensed to practice, passing the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians certification examination. Paramedics must complete continuing education

credits and renew their license every two or three years. You may need separate state certifications, depending on your local and state regulations.

## WORKING AS A PARAMEDIC

Most paramedics work full time and often more than 40 hours per week. Schedules include nights, weekends and

holidays, and the work may be both mentally and physically stressful. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics expects the employment of EMTs and paramedics to grow by 5% by 2032, which the agency says is faster than average for all occupations. The BLS expects about 18,100 openings for EMTs and paramedics each year, on average, over the decade.

# Travel Nursing: What to Know

One response to the nationwide shortage of nursing professionals in the United States is the travel nursing industry.

Travel nurses are regular registered nurses who take temporary positions, often through an agency, in high-need areas. They work in hospitals, clinics and other facilities.

## HISTORY

St. Catherine University says today's travel nursing industry started in the 1970s, when persistent nursing shortages in warmer, Southern states drew nurses from northern states during the winter. They often accompanied snowbirds — people who move south during colder months to escape northern winters.

At first, St. Catherine's says these arrangements were informal. They would travel south and be hired as regular full-time employees until the season ended and they moved back north. The hospitals and clinics did not provide housing or extra wages for the split season.

Today, travel nurses often work for health care staffing agencies that specialize in placing temporary contractors across the country. These agencies take a cut of the nurse's pay, but in exchange,



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advocate for secure housing, competitive salaries and transportation.

Benefits vary from agency to agency; ask friends, family and colleagues for recommendations when choosing an agency. Some have alliances with specific hospital networks or regions of the county, or even in certain nursing specializations.

## WHAT A TRAVEL NURSE NEEDS TO KNOW

Travel nurses need to be able to learn new systems quickly and adapt easily to change. They should have plenty of experience nursing in a traditional context; they often need to draw on that knowledge as they move from facility to facility. Travel nurses should be able to learn new

technologies and standards of practice quickly.

Resiliency is another important skill. Being the new kid on the block almost constantly can be a challenge and travel nurses need to be able to withstand that pressure, as well as all of the other pressures that come with working in a health care environment.

Travel nurses should be

flexible with scheduling, including with the length of their employment at a given facility. It's helpful if travel nurses have a strong support network as well. They are frequently asked to leave behind friends and family for long stretches of time, and a solid support network can be critical to keeping sanity amidst the chaos.

# An Occupational Therapist's Job

Occupational therapists are health care professionals who evaluate and treat patients with injuries, illnesses or disabilities to help them with life skills, vocational skills and other things that promote independent living.

They may work in schools, hospitals and outpatient clinics and may need to stand for long periods and lift or move patients.

## HOW TO BECOME AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

Aspiring occupational therapists must earn at least a master's degree. The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) recommends an Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education-accredited occupational therapy program or occupational therapy assistant program. As for a bachelor's degree, AOTA recommends majoring in a field such as biology, kinesiology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, liberal arts or anatomy. The organization says it's important to check with the master's programs you wish to apply to and make sure you have fulfilled or will fulfill all the prerequisites for that program.



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You may be required to fulfill a fieldwork requirement. AOTA says fieldwork should provide you an opportunity to practice and carry out other professional responsibilities under the supervision and mentorship of an experienced practitioner.

Once your education is complete, you must pass the National Board of Certification in Occupational

Therapy (NBCOT) exam. You may have to meet certain requirements for licensure in your state; check with its occupational therapy regulatory agency for details.

## LICENSURE

State and local licensure procedures vary, but the AOTA outlines a core of requirements common to almost every jurisdiction. That

includes graduation from an accredited educational program, completing the fieldwork requirements, passing the NBCOT exam and completing an initial license application (usually with a fee) in each state or jurisdiction where you want to practice.

You may have to complete a state or federal criminal background check, pass an exam on a state's law and regula-

tions and produce an official final transcript from your educational program. Some states may allow you to practice on a temporary license or limited permit with specific supervision requirements. They're only effective for a limited amount of time and cannot be renewed. Failing your licensure exam usually means this temporary license is revoked.

# Health Care Administration Jobs

Health care administrators plan, direct and coordinate the business activities of providers such as hospitals to encourage better outcomes for that provider's patients.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects an amazing 32% growth for medical and health services managers, which is far above average for all occupations. Here are some careers to consider in health care administration.

## **PATIENT REGISTRAR**

Patient registrars check in and register a health care provider's patients. They may process billing and provide customer support. Job duties may include explaining forms to patients, handling payment and verifying insurance. Patient registrars may manage patient information databases, ensure all information is current, respond to patient concerns and schedule appointments.

## **MEDICAL RECORDS ASSOCIATE OR CLERK**

Medical records associates or clerks prepare medical forms and assign new record numbers to incoming patients. They file a patient's medical observations, diagnoses, prescriptions and medical history in an accessible location. Medical records associates or clerks are expected to observe strict patient confidentiality. They may be responsible for organizing patient files, both on paper and electronically, as well as fetching them in a timely manner.

## **COMPLIANCE OFFICER**

A health care compliance officer (often shortened to HCO) ensures that



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an organization adheres to all applicable laws, regulations and policies. They are responsible for developing, implementing and monitoring compliance programs to help health care providers and support staff stay within legal and ethical boundaries. HCOs should be intimately familiar with local, state and federal health care laws and regulations. They will be responsible for reviewing and relaying required regulatory docu-

ments and overseeing the secure signing of consent and other patient forms.

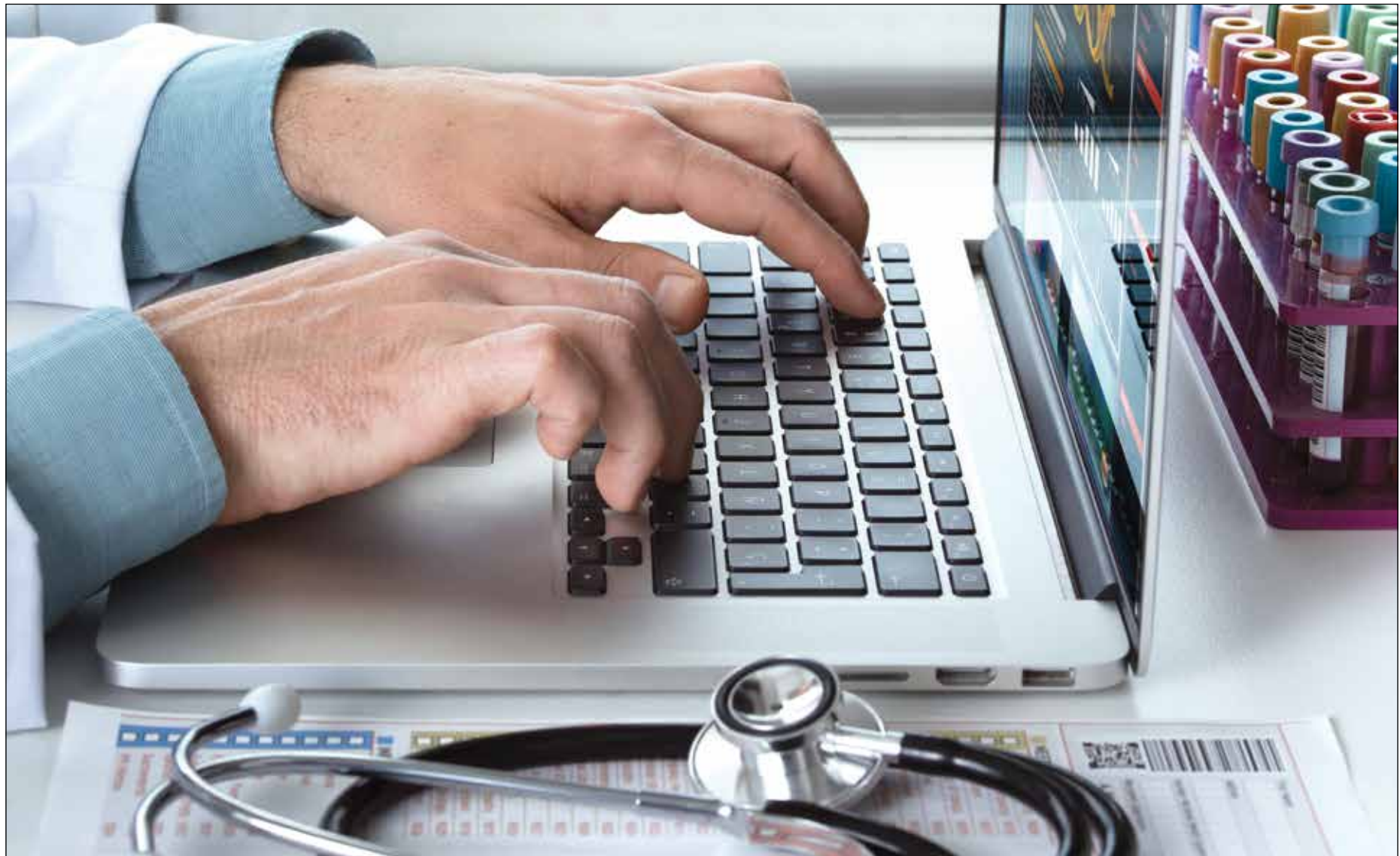
## **NURSING DIRECTOR**

The nursing director is a top administrator at a hospital or other clinic. They may make decisions related to hiring and firing staff, developing a business plan and budget for nursing services, implementing nursing policies and procedures and establishing departmental

goals. Nursing directors may act as a liaison between departments and act as representatives of the nursing staff as a whole. Nursing directors require considerable education and experience, including a master's or even doctoral degree in nursing. Organizations typically prefer candidates with certifications related to administrative abilities or significant experience as a nurse administrator.

# What Is Health Informatics?

Michigan Tech University says that about 30% of the world's data is generated by the health care industry. Health informatics professionals take that data and transform it into useful, actionable information.



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## MORE ABOUT THE JOB

Health informatics professionals use data analytics and artificial intelligence to dive deep into health care data, developing insights and driving innovation in the medical field. Specifically, they may develop and improve patient portals, create cloud-based health care systems and personalize treatment plans. This all helps improve patient outcomes and make health care systems more efficient.

## WHAT ARE SOME HEALTH INFORMATICS CAREERS?

Health informatics careers include public health informatics, which focuses on using information technology to educate the public and keep track of current medical research.

Public health informatics professionals may help design and implement new methods in the field.

Organizational informatics is

the study of communication within medical organizations and the collation of data medical organizations use. Social informatics involves researching the social implications of computerization and the way information technology affects perceptions of computers. It's based more on research and theory. Clinical informatics is the study of the ways information technology affects clinical research and medical education.

When paired with social informatics, it can inform

patient education and improve perceptions of health care processes.

## JOB TITLES TO KNOW

Some job titles in the health informatics field include health informatics specialist, clinical analyst, clinical informatics specialist, nursing informatics specialist, pharmacy informaticist, nutrition informaticist, clinical informatics manager, health informatics consultant, informatics nurse, health care IT project manager and informatics director.

## SKILL SET

Health informatics professionals need a strong background in computer programming, including applying statistical analysis techniques to data and drawing out insights with the help of technology such as artificial intelligence. Data analytics is another important skill, as well as experience with health information technology such as electronic health records and clinical health data systems.

Those aspiring to be managers should also get educa-

tion and certifications involving managing teams and heading up strategic project management.

Some common degree programs include bachelor of science in health informatics, bachelor of science in information technology, bachelor of science in business or information technology management, master of science in health informatics, master of science information systems, master of science in health informatics and master of science in nursing informatics.