



# Health Care Careers

# The Skills You'll Need

Those pursuing a career in health care will need to possess a variety of highly technical skills to be successful.

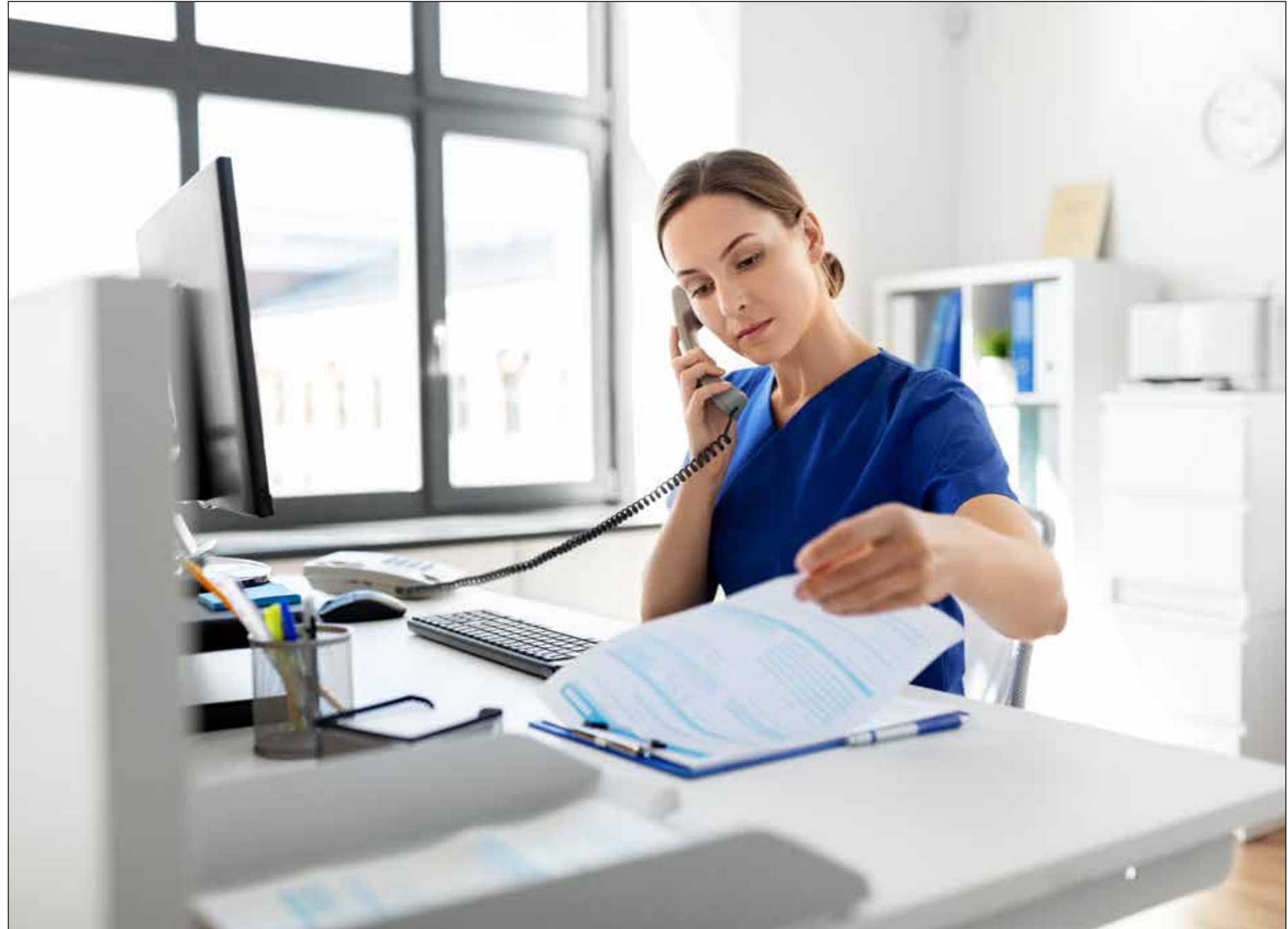
It all starts, of course, with extensive education and training. But healthcare professionals must excel in patient interactions, creating a sense of confidence while under their care. Don't forget about these critical so-called soft skills:

## COMMUNICATION

Effective communication is essential in any work environment, but it's that much more critically important in medicine. Healthcare professionals must be able to clearly convey instructions to patients, supervisors and colleagues throughout the evaluation and treatment process. The better the team member's communication skills, the easier it is for patients to follow medical recommendations. That leads to better health outcomes.

## EMPATHY

Compassion is another crucial soft skill. When patients are faced with a serious health issue, they need care from an understanding professional. Before entering this industry, ensure that you can handle challenging situations with empathy. You have to be the kind of person who can manage the emotions of these



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moments. Patients rely on you as a trusted healthcare provider to be at your best when times are tough.

## MANAGING STRESS

In a medical setting, stress must be effectively managed because of the consistently high stakes involved. You'll be asked to conduct yourself in a busy work environment with

a composed attitude. If you tend to feel overwhelmed, explore new stress management strategies. Engage in physical activity, listen to soothing music or attend therapy sessions to promote a positive mindset. Experiment with different techniques until you hit upon what works best for your mental well-being.

## TEAMWORK

Finally, collaboration is a huge part of any healthcare setting. You'll be required to work closely with colleagues in developing a plan for patient care. In the event of a disagreement, calm, rational discussions must be had rather than simply disregarding a peer's input. As compromises are reached, a stronger team dynamic will

emerge.

Remember that each member of the medical staff brings their own unique perspectives and skills to the table. By working together, you can more consistently provide the best possible care for your patients. Foster a supportive environment while building trust within your team. You'll enjoy increased job satisfaction, too.



# Helping with Mental Health

As more people acknowledge the importance of a comprehensive approach to wellness, the field of mental healthcare has been quickly expanding.

So have the number of jobs. Identifying and promptly addressing these conditions and disorders requires specialized training. Here's a look at some of the most widely held mental health occupations, their educational requirements and care responsibilities:

## PSYCHIATRIST

Psychiatrists are medical doctors who specialize in mental health. They are trained to evaluate both the mental and physical aspects of psychological issues. Psychiatrists use methods such as psychotherapy, medications, psychosocial interventions and other treatments for individuals with mental health issues.

Psychiatrists must complete medical school, obtain a license to practice medicine and complete a four-year psychiatry residency. Board-certified psychiatrists must pass a written and oral exam administered by the American Board of Psychiatry. They can order or conduct medical, psychological and laboratory tests to gain a more comprehensive understanding

of their patient's condition. They're required to undergo recertification every decade.

## PSYCHOLOGIST

Psychologists examine cognitive, social and emotional behaviors using a combination of observation and their own interpretation of how patients interact with friends, family and their surroundings. Psychologists may work as part of a larger healthcare team or in an individual practice. They

typically hold a doctoral degree in psychology, although a master's degree sometimes suffices depending on the role. Most psychologists must go through a licensing process.

## THERAPIST

Therapists are professionals trained to assist in treating mental or physical health problems, typically through psychotherapy, but they are not doctors. Some examples of therapists include licensed

clinical social workers, licensed marriage and family therapists and licensed addiction counselors. They may serve as the initial point of contact for those seeking mental health care or hold a long-term counseling role.

## NURSE

Registered psychiatric nurses are the second-largest group of behavioral health professionals in the U.S., according to the American Psychiatric Nurses

Association. This type of nursing requires a diverse skill set, including expertise in neurobiology and psychosocial behaviors. Once on board, they'll offer assessment, education, diagnosis and treatment for those with mental health and substance abuse issues. Advanced practice nurses in this field may provide psychotherapy, conduct assessments and therapies, prescribe medication and perform procedures.





# Associate Degree Options

The medical field is often associated with extensive stints in higher education, but there are actually numerous opportunities for those with an associate degree.

You might be able to get going in the healthcare industry — and start helping people — more quickly than you think. Here are a few examples:



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## **CERTIFIED NURSING ASSISTANT**

CNAs monitor patients in various settings such as hospitals, nursing homes and private residences. They provide hands-on care, helping with daily tasks like dressing, bathing and meal preparation. Certified nursing assistants also report any changes in a patient's condition.

## **LABORATORY TECHNICIAN**

If you have a passion for science, this role may be perfect for you. Laboratory technicians analyze samples like biopsies and blood to detect diseases. While they usually don't interact directly with patients, they play a crucial role in diagnosis and treatment.

## **MEDICAL CODER**

Coders translate patient

information and treatment details into a standardized set of codes used across the healthcare industry. These codes are designed for use on insurance forms and a patient's medical documentation.

## **MEDICAL OFFICE RECEPTIONIST**

Receptionists are responsible for managing customer service at the front desk of healthcare offices. They assist with scheduling appointments, processing payments, handling various administrative duties as required and

may assist with anxious patients as a first point of contact.

## **MEDICAL TRANSCRIPTIONIST**

As with coders and receptionists, medical transcriptionists play a critical role without ever seeing the inside of an operating room. Their role is to transcribe the doctor's conversations and notes for medical records and charts. Transcriptionists will document symptoms, medical histories, patient exams, diagnoses and treatments.

## **PARAMEDIC**

Paramedics deliver emergency medical care in critical situations, similar to emergency medical technicians. The difference is in training: Paramedics perform more complex procedures such as administering medications and inserting IVs.

## **PATIENT SERVICES**

Patient service representatives serve as intermediaries between patients, their family members and the medical staff in healthcare facilities and hospitals. They are typically

responsible for greeting patients, providing essential health information, scheduling appointments and maintaining records. These representatives may help address some of patients' individual concerns.

## **PHARMACY TECH**

Pharmacy technicians collaborate with licensed pharmacists to prepare and distribute medication. Their role is to compile and distribute prescriptions, providing patients with critical information regarding their medications and specific treatment plans.



# Genetic Testing Careers

Genetic testing has seen massive growth as we've learned more about its ability to determine the risk of disease.

The tests became increasingly accessible even as research in the field rapidly progressed. That's created a hot job market for genetic counselors, with new jobs arriving at a faster rate than the average for all occupations according to statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor. Here's how to get involved in this exciting field:

## WHAT DO THEY DO?

Genetic counselors meet with individuals and families to evaluate their risk of genetic disorders, and provide information about the condition and its inheritance patterns. They discuss testing options, while offering guidance and emotional support. Genetic counselors must have great communication skills, as they explain complex concepts to those who may have a lesser understanding of genetics or science. They are empathetic listeners who can effectively connect with their patients.

The best genetic counselors have strong analytical skills allowing them to interpret complex genetic data and connect it with a patient's medical history. They must be able to recognize patterns, trends and



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potential risk factors. Other important skills in this field include ethical decision-making, team building, attention to detail, a broad cultural understanding and a passion for learning continuously.

## ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS

Anyone aspiring to become a genetic counselor typically must obtain a master's degree in genetic counseling, after

studying medical ethics, counseling and genetics. After earning the degree, prospective counselors in the U.S. must obtain certification from the American Board of Genetic Counseling. The board requires certification candidates to meet specific education and training requirements as well as pass an exam. In some states, genetic counselors must be licensed.

## CHALLENGES OF THE JOB

Because of rapid growth in this field, there is generally good job security – but that doesn't mean there won't be challenges. Genetic counselors often support patients and their families as they face the realization of genetic risks or disorders. This burden requires genetic counselors to show great empathy; they also need to practice self-care.

## WHERE DO COUNSELORS WORK?

Genetic counselors can find employment in several healthcare settings beyond research laboratories, including hospitals, clinics and private practices. Typically, the work environment is collaborative, with genetic counselors working alongside geneticists, physicians and other healthcare professionals.

# Respiratory Care

Respiratory health moved to the forefront of public attention during the pandemic era and has remained there as a series of variants emerged. These specialists focus on far more than treating patients with COVID-19, however.

They also help those suffering from flu, asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia, COPD, cystic fibrosis, sleep apnea, emphysema, lung cancer and pulmonary diseases. Because of this, the demand for respiratory therapists continues unabated.

## JOB RESPONSIBILITIES

These therapists assess patients' respiratory function and create treatment plans, including medications, chest physiotherapy, oxygen therapy or ventilators. They administer prescribed therapies, monitor the progress of treatment, and educate patients and their families. In emergencies, respiratory therapists are trained to perform intubation, CPR and other life-saving procedures when patients experience cardiac arrests or respiratory failure.

## CANDIDATE EXPECTATIONS

Respiratory therapists must



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have a solid grasp of respiratory physiology, exceptional communication abilities and the capacity to collaborate effectively with other healthcare professionals.

In addition to foundational knowledge of respiratory physiology and certain technical skills, therapists need to have strong communication skills, empathy, problem-solving abilities, physical endurance and the capacity to perform effectively under pressure.

## ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS

To pursue a career as a respiratory therapist, you must complete an accredited respiratory therapy program. Some employers accept a two-year associate's degree, while others require a four-year bachelor's degree. Coursework typically includes subjects such as anatomy, pharmacology, physiology and patient care, followed by a clinical rotation. After obtaining their degree, aspiring respiratory therapists

may need a license or certification, depending on the state. There could also be a requirement for continuing education.

## INSIDE THE JOB MARKET

Beyond the lives they save, many professionals in this field find it fulfilling to help patients breathe easier while enhancing their quality of life. It's a field with significant job growth and no small amount of flexibility. Respiratory therapists work in settings from hospitals and clinics to nursing

homes and individual patient homes.

Team players will enjoy close collaborations with doctors, nurses and related healthcare professionals to craft a comprehensive care plan. Still, the job can be emotionally challenging, particularly when dealing with critically ill patients — and it's physically demanding. There are irregular hours (including weekends, nights and holidays) and the risk of exposure to infectious diseases will always remain.



# Become a First Responder

Emergency medical technicians play a crucial role in the health care system as the first responders to medical emergencies.

It's a fast-paced, adrenaline-filled career in which you can really make a difference. After all, not everyone can say they have the responsibility of saving lives.

## WHAT EMTS DO

EMTs are certified health-care professionals who provide basic medical assistance in the field. They are trained to handle various medical emergencies such as injuries, external bleeding, CPR and respiratory issues. Emergency medical technicians work for hospitals, fire and rescue squads and ambulance services. After initially working in tandem with firefighters and police officers, EMTs then ensure patients are safely transported to hospitals for further treatment.

## TRAINING PROGRAMS

Some EMT programs can be completed in as little as 16 weeks, but this can vary depending on where you live. Begin your journey by learning more about the various levels of certification for emergency medical technicians, starting with EMT-Basic. There are also certifications for EMT-Intermediate and



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EMT-Paramedic, with advanced training and responsibilities as you go.

## EMT CERTIFICATIONS

EMT-Basic (or EMT-B) is the standard certification level. EMT-Bs perform life-saving procedures such as external defibrillation and CPR but are not authorized to perform more invasive procedures. Basic training typically takes around 150 hours, but this can

vary based on local requirements. EMT-Intermediate (or EMT-I, EMT-A and AEMT) put in additional training and are cleared to insert IVs, intubate patients and administer non-prescribed drugs. EMT-Paramedic is the highest level of certification. These EMTs may administer drugs orally or through IVs, clean wounds, perform manual defibrillation and interpret lab results, EKGs and X-rays.

## EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

EMT candidates must be at least 18 years old and have earned either a high school or equivalent diploma. Candidates must successfully pass both motor and cognitive skills examinations. They must hold a valid CPR certification and complete a state-approved program that meets standards set by the National Registry of Emergency Medical

Technicians.

## BEFORE YOU APPLY

All candidates undergo a drug test and criminal background check as part of the evaluation process. You may be asked to provide medical records. Emergency medical technicians are consistently exposed to difficult situations like car accidents, gunshot wounds and fires, so consider the fact that post-traumatic stress may be an issue.



# Serving an Aging Population

As the general population continues to age, studying the effects of growing older has become increasingly important.

Gerontology brings in several elements in the study of old age, including healthcare, social and behavioral sciences, social work, biology and economics, among other things. If you're interested in enhancing the well-being and quality of life for older people, consider a career in gerontology.

## UNDERSTANDING THE TERM

Gerontology is distinct from the field of geriatrics, even though they both focus on the study of aging. Geriatrics concentrates on the medical care of seniors, specifically addressing the physical aspects of aging. Gerontology, on the other hand, is a much broader discipline. These specialists take a more holistic approach while addressing emotional, mental, spiritual and physical needs. Of course, despite these differences, both share the common goal of enhancing the lives of older adults.

## A BRIEF HISTORY

Nobel laureate Elie Metchnikoff, a pioneering researcher into aging, is said to have first introduced the term "gerontology" back in 1903. But the



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study of aging didn't really begin to gain momentum until the late 1930s when the Woods Hole Conference took a deep dive into aging-related issues. As interest in the field grew, the Gerontological Society of America was established.

## CAREER PATHS

More and more universities now offer certified programs in gerontology, either as part

of advanced degree options or as a standalone degree track. Prospective specialists may begin with a bachelor's degree in nursing, psychology or social work and then further their education by completing a master's degree in gerontology. There are online programs for those who want to find out more about this career.

Degree in hand, possible

top-line career paths include psychologist, occupational therapist, sociologist, family therapist, financial adviser, social worker, counselor or scientist, among many others. Any profession that includes working with aging populations can be bolstered by the study of gerontology.

## A CRITICAL NEED

Today, patients who are over

65 make up almost half of all admissions to U.S. hospitals. Yet finding a doctor who specializes in aging remains difficult. The Washington Post reports that there were just 7,300 U.S. board-certified geriatricians in 2024. That's fewer than one percent of all physicians. The specific number of gerontologists can be harder to discern, because of the profession's complexity.