

IS NURSING FOR YOU?

Introduction

Are you thinking about entering the healthcare field? If you are a nurse's aide, a licensed practical nurse, or an allied health technician wishing to broaden your health career, nursing may be for you!

Nursing offers opportunities from bedside practice to the president or top administrator of a healthcare organization. Clinical specialist, nurse practitioner, nurse administrator and nurse educator are just a few examples of the variety of opportunities awaiting you in a nursing career. Nurses are also appointed and elected to influential government positions. If you choose nursing, you will discover a career filled with personal and professional rewards.

Nursing involves the care of people throughout the continuum of life and provides an essential service to humankind. As career professionals, nurses improve the quality of health care delivery.

Nurses work in a variety of practice settings including hospitals, long-term care facilities, community and public health agencies, independent practice, ambulatory care centers, U.S. Public Health Service, military services (Army, Navy and Air Force), Veteran's Administration Medical Centers, and in any setting where people need health care services. Nursing needs capable people from every ethnic and religious background, and nursing positions are available throughout the United States as well as internationally.

As a nurse, you can choose to practice in many geographic locations. You can work in metropolitan areas like New York City or San Francisco, or settings such as a Native American Indian reservation, or with the Frontier Nursing Service in Kentucky. Other possibilities include rural areas such as Maine and Vermont, mining towns in Utah or Colorado, suburban communities in Illinois or New York State, and senior citizen clusters like St. Petersburg or Miami, Florida.

Many nurses begin their careers working in [hospitals](#), which offer opportunities to work in medical/surgical nursing, maternity, and pediatrics as well as in critical care areas. As your career develops, you may choose to practice in one of the many [specialized areas of nursing](#). Specialty nursing acute areas include emergency nursing, operating room nursing, coronary care, and intensive care specialties such as trauma, cardiac surgery, respiratory, pediatrics, and newborn intensive-care. Acute care involves critical thinking, technical skills, and high-level decision-making in life and death situations.

Nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists practice in many areas of nursing including: parent-child, pediatric, adult, family, geriatric, and psychiatric-mental health. Nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists have earned a masters degree in advanced nursing practice enabling them to practice in expanded roles. These roles include advanced assessment skills and prescriptive privileges.

Nursing school is intellectually challenging. Students need to be in good health and to have a genuine desire to help others regardless of how challenging their illness might be. You must also attend to the emotional needs of patients and families to help them get through their health crisis.

Getting Into Nursing

Three different types of nursing education programs enable you to take the State Board of Nursing Licensure Examination. The programs are: associate degree in nursing program; the baccalaureate degree in nursing program; and the diploma hospital school nursing program. Differences in these programs are discussed later.

Entrance requirements for nursing schools vary. All programs may require one or more of the following standardized entrance exams: the “Scholastic Aptitude Test” (SAT) of the College Entrance Examination Board; the “American College Test” (ACT) of the American College Testing Program; the “Pre-Nursing and Guidance Examination” of the National League for Nursing; and the “Entrance Examination for Schools of Nursing” of the Psychological Testing Corporation. Each school establishes its own admission score.

All programs require a high school diploma or its equivalent. Applicants must meet the same institutional requirements as students entering colleges or universities. Generally, this means that applicants must have taken courses in English, math, science, and social studies.

Selecting a Program

When selecting a nursing school, the student should choose a school that is state-approved. This insures that the program meets the minimum legal requirements set by that state for the preparation of nurses for licensure. Only graduates of state-approved programs are eligible to take the state licensure examination. The National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC) and the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) are national accrediting agencies for nursing education programs, recognized by the Council on Post Secondary Accreditation and U.S. Department of Education, and by the nursing profession itself. Graduates from accredited schools are more likely to receive credit for previous educational experiences when applying for further study. The [NLNAC](#) and the [CCNE](#) maintain lists of accredited schools. Lists may be accessed on NSNA’s Web Site www.nsna.org, by clicking on CAREER CENTER on the home page. It is wise to explore and to apply to several programs to keep many options open.

The three basic types of nursing education programs all prepare students to take the [State Board Licensure Examination](#) upon completion of the required courses. Which program is right for you?

Associate Degree in Nursing (AD) programs are generally available at community colleges. The ADN program balances content with general studies and nursing education. The program offers a wide variety of clinical nursing experiences and prepares graduates to deliver direct care to patients.

Once the nursing prerequisites are completed, it is common for the student to complete the nursing course requirements in two years. Many ADN programs are designed to be “articulated” (serve a bridge to) baccalaureate degree programs or RN to masters completion programs. The student should ask what arrangements have been made between the ADN program and the baccalaureate of science in nursing (BSN) completion programs.

Baccalaureate of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree programs are generally four

academic years in length and are located in senior colleges or universities. The course of study combines the theory and the practice of nursing, with general education in the humanities and behavioral, biological, and physical sciences. These serve as a core for the development of the nursing major. The BSN program offers students experience in major settings where health care is delivered. Baccalaureate education prepares graduates for entrance into graduate study at the master's degree level, a minimum requirement for teaching, administration, clinical specialization, and nursing research.

Diploma Hospital School Nursing programs are based in hospitals, and often include academic courses at nearby colleges or universities in the biological, physical, and social sciences, as well as English. Diploma programs offer a wide variety of clinical nursing experience, along with principles of nursing care and classes in basic sciences and humanities.

Graduates of diploma nursing programs who wish to pursue a BSN may receive some college credit by demonstrating specific knowledge and skills on placement testing. Diploma courses, however, may not be equivalent to college credit courses.

Tuition charges for all programs vary considerably, depending on whether it is a public or private institution. State residency may be another factor in publicly supported schools. Public institutions are generally the least expensive.

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Requirements for a Successful Nursing Career

You and your career counselor should explore the following questions openly and honestly when considering a nursing career:

- What is your level of achievement in high school and/or college?
- Will a part-time or full-time job be necessary while attending school?
- Are you able to move to another location to attend school?
- What are your nursing career goals (i.e. bedside nursing, public health, teaching, research, administration)?
- What are your long-term academic and career goals (masters' degree, doctorate)?

Trends in health care delivery and health education predict that nursing preparation at the graduate level is necessary in the future.

The following are ideal qualities for pursuing a nursing career:

Academic ability. Nursing education makes intellectual demands on the student. You must be a serious student with proficiency in the health sciences.

Responsibility. When you earn the privilege of using the title "registered nurse," you also assume legal and ethical accountability for your actions. Nurses must respect confidentiality, use good judgment, and be loyal to patients and to the profession.

Acceptance and Caring. Nurses must respect the rights of all people regardless of age, race, social status, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs. Nurses demonstrate unbiased compassion for all.

Eagerness to Learn. Nurses are motivated to keep up with trends and research in the profession and to value life-long learning.

Confidence. Nurses must learn to handle catastrophe and crisis, and everyday challenges, in a confident, efficient, and caring way.

Determination. The road to becoming a registered nurse is not easy. You will need good mental and physical health, plenty of stamina and endurance, a sense of humor, and most of all, a determination to succeed.

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After You Graduate

After completing a nursing program, you are required to pass the National Council Licensure Examination to become a Registered Nurse (NCLEX-RN®)

Although salaries vary widely across the country, they are improving steadily. In the large metropolitan areas such as New York City and Chicago, a beginning graduate may earn \$42,000 or more, with additional benefit packages adding \$5,000 or more to the base salary. Clinical specialty areas such as medical/surgical, obstetrics, pediatrics, acute care, emergency, psychiatry, cancer nursing, operating and recovery rooms, are included in many hospitals. There are many opportunities for nurses to practice in community health centers, long-term care facilities, nursing homes, mental health settings, and rehabilitation centers. Teaching, administration, research, clinical nurse specialist, and nurse practitioner positions require advanced education at the masters and doctoral level. If you have a specific nursing specialty in mind, it's a good idea to check out the education and experience requirements before choosing a nursing education program.

Once you have made the exciting choice to enter nursing school, you should join the National Student Nurses' Association (NSNA). NSNA provides nursing students with scholarship, loan, career planning and financial services information, as well as [programs](#), [publications](#), and [leadership](#) and [networking opportunities](#). Write to the National Student Nurses' Association, Inc., at 45 Main Street, Suite 606, Brooklyn, NY 11201, or [click here](#) for membership information.

If personal and professional satisfaction and rewards are what you're looking for, nursing *is* for you!