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Careers in Nursing

Registered Nurses (RN) work to promote health, prevent disease and help patients cope with illness. They are advocates and health educators for patients, families and communities. When providing direct patient care, they observe, assess and record symptoms, reactions and progress in patients; assist physicians during surgeries, treatments and examinations; administer medications; and assist in convalescence and rehabilitation. RNs also develop and manage nursing care plans, instruct patients and their families in proper care and help individuals and groups take steps to improve or maintain their health.

Registered Nurses (RN) constitute the largest group among all the health occupations. Most RNs work in acute care hospitals as hospital nurses. They care for patients at the hospital bedside, in private clinics, and in the patient's home. Nurses may also work to help prevent disease, to educate the public about health issues, to enhance public health, and to support ill patients both physically and mentally.

Hospital Nurses make up the largest group of nurses. They perform the following tasks:

- Provide bedside care for hospital in-patients.
- Monitor all aspects of patient care, including diet and physical activity.
- Administer treatment and give medications to patients under the direction of physicians.
- Observe the patient, assess and record symptoms, and note reactions and progress.
- Develop and manage nursing care plans and instruct patients and caregivers in how to perform tasks they can do themselves.

Hospital nurses usually are assigned to one department such as surgery, maternity, pediatrics, the emergency room, intensive care or the treatment of cancer patients. Some may rotate among departments. They also may supervise licensed practical nurses and nursing aides.

Office Nurses work in doctor's offices, clinics, emergency care centers, and Health Maintenance Organizations (HMO). They perform the following tasks:

- Prepare patients for and administer physical examinations.
- Dress wounds, give injections or medicines, and assist in minor surgeries.
- May help with the management of the office and supervise other staff.

Some office nurses also perform routine laboratory duties.

Nursing Care Facility Nurses manage care for residents with conditions ranging from a fracture to Alzheimer's disease. They also work in specialty-care departments, such as long-term rehabilitation units for patients with strokes and head injuries.

Home Health Nurses provide health care in patient's homes. They perform the following tasks:

- Travel to patient's homes and administer medications, check the physical and mental condition of patients, and instruct the patient on proper home care.
- Educate the patient and family in various aspects of home health. Nurses may teach, counsel, and demonstrate skills.
- Act as an intermediary between the physician, hospital, staff, and the patient.
- May supervise other home health workers.

Home Health Nurses care for a broad range of patients, such as those recovering from illnesses and accidents, cancer and childbirth. Home Health Nurses must be able to work independently.

Public Health Nurses work for governmental agencies, schools, clinics, and retirement communities. They work to better the health conditions for the general public. Instead of administering care to the individual, their mission is to enhance the overall health of the community at large. They perform the following tasks:

- Work in concert with local governments to remedy health problems that are present in the community.
- They lecture groups on healthy living, disease prevention, nutrition, and how to identify health risks in the community.
- Arrange immunization clinics, blood pressure testing, cholesterol level testing, and other health screening clinics.
- Work with pregnant women to ensure proper prenatal care.
- Work to decrease the incidence of infectious diseases and assist in quarantine efforts. Make field investigations and help in epidemiological health studies.

What Skills Are Important?

Skills, knowledge, and abilities required and used by Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners include:

- **Speaking** - Talking to others to effectively convey information.
- **Service Orientation** - Actively looking for ways to help people.
- **Social Perceptiveness** - Being aware of others' reactions and understanding why they react the way they do.
- **Reading Comprehension** - Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work related documents.

- **Oral Comprehension** - The ability to listen to and understand information and ideas presented through spoken words and sentences.
- **Judgment and Decision Making** - Weighing the relative costs and benefits of a potential action.
- **Biology** - Knowledge of plant and animal living tissue, cells, organisms, and entities, including their functions, interdependencies, and interactions with each other and the environment.
- **Chemistry** - Knowledge of the composition, structure, and properties of substances and of the chemical processes and transformations that they undergo. This includes uses of chemicals and their interactions, danger signs, production techniques, and disposal methods.
- **Customer and Personal Service** - Knowledge of principles and processes for providing customer and personal services including needs assessment techniques, quality service standards, alternative delivery systems, and customer satisfaction evaluation techniques.
- **Problem Sensitivity** - The ability to tell when something is wrong or is likely to go wrong. It does not involve solving the problem, only recognizing there is a problem.
- **Critical Thinking** - Using logic and analysis to identify the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches.

What's the Work Environment?

Nurses generally work in hospitals and clinics in a comfortable and well-lit environment. Although most tasks are not strenuous, Nurses do need physical stamina to perform their duties. They also need emotional stability to cope with human suffering and frequent emergencies. Since they work as part of a closely-knit team, they must work well with others in a cooperative setting.

Dangers from infectious agents are also part of the work environment. Diseases such as AIDS, hepatitis, and tuberculosis present the possibility of infection to the RN. Strictly following procedures can lessen, but not eliminate disease transmission.

A few Registered Nurses work as members of emergency response teams. They may treat patients while enroute by helicopter to hospitals or at triage centers at disaster sites, such as earthquakes or floods.

Nurse-Midwives, licensed to provide care and treatment to pregnant women, often deliver babies in patients' homes. In addition to hospitals, Nurses work for doctors and medical groups, public health agencies, and home care services.

Trends

Nursing shortages exist and shortages are expected to occur over the next 10 years. This is due to workers leaving and re-entering several times during their career. Hospital

and clinics continue to have ongoing, active recruitment programs, some offering unique benefits, to attract applicants.

How do I Prepare for the Job?

Education and Training

Registered Nurses must be licensed to practice in New Mexico by the State Board of Registered Nursing. The license requirements are:

- Completion of a board-approved nursing program.
- A passing grade on the State Board examination.

Two types of Registered Nurse training programs are available in New Mexico:

Two-year community college associate degree programs and four-year bachelor's degree programs. Both programs include clinical experience in one or more hospitals and clinics in addition to classroom instruction.

Prospective Nurses should exhibit leadership, self-confidence, and emotional stability. Other needed traits are a pleasant personality, patience, and an ability to deal with people of all cultures and social levels.

Where Can This Job Lead?

Experienced RNs may advance from bedside nursing to supervisory positions or clinical specialist positions, such as Critical Care Nurse. Those with bachelor's degrees may become nursing administrators, consultants, educators, or Researchers. A growing number take special courses, often earning a master's degree, to become Nurse Practitioners.

A Registered Nurse may promote to become the Director of Nursing, who is responsible for hiring the nursing staff and overseeing all nursing functions.