

Health Care CAREERS



Careers with an Associate Degree

Not every medical job takes years and years of higher education.

There are plenty of opportunities in this fast-growing industry that you can take advantage of with just an associate degree. Here are just a few.

CLINICAL LABORATORY TECHNICIAN

If you ever wanted to be a scientist, now's your chance. These technicians test lab samples, such as biopsies and blood, to look for diseases. They may not work directly with patients, but they do play a critical role with diagnosis and treatment.

MEDICAL SCRIBE

Squeamish about blood? That's OK. Medical scribes transcribe doctor recordings and conversations into medical documents and charts. Scribes record the details of patient exams, clinical histories, symptoms, diagnoses and procedures. They're usually found in doctor's offices and hospitals, probably pretty far from the blood.

CERTIFIED NURSING ASSISTANT

Otherwise called a CNA, these professionals monitor patients in nursing homes, hospitals, residential treatment centers and even in private homes. They provide direct patient care, assisting with daily activities such as



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bathing, getting dressed and preparing meals. They also report any changes in the patient's health status, including vital signs.

PHARMACY TECHNICIAN

Pharmacy technicians work alongside licensed pharmacists to assemble and dispense medications. They put together prescriptions and give patients information about what they've been prescribed and their treatment plan.

PATIENT SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE

These health care professionals act as liaisons between patients, family members and medical staff in doctor's offices and hospitals. These people are usually the ones that greet you, schedule your appointments, give you your vital health information, keep records and look into patient concerns.

DENTAL RECEPTIONIST

If you've got a knack for cus-

tommer service, this might be the job for you. Dental receptionists staff the front desk in dentist's offices, soothing nervous patients, setting appointments, taking payments and doing other administrative tasks as needed.

PARAMEDIC

Like emergency medical technicians, paramedics provide emergency medical treatment in high-stakes situations. But they are trained to perform

more complex procedures. Paramedics can insert IVs and administer medication while EMTs assess patient condition and perform other tasks.

MEDICAL CODER

These professionals work in health care facilities to convert patient information and treatment names into a set of standardized codes used by the industry. These codes are used on insurance forms and other documentation.

Health Care Administration

Health care, while one of the fastest growing fields in America, is also one of the largest.

Administrators are needed at every level to oversee providers, insurers, regulators and more.

Jobs for health care administrators are expected to grow more than 30% through 2030, Mount Vernon Nazarene University says. These are just a sampling of the job titles out there.

CLINICAL MANAGER

These are administrators in charge of the entire clinic. They may design and implement policies and manage billing. They may also call staff meetings and train new employees, schedule daily treatment plans, supervise non-physician staff members or even run whole departments.

HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATORS

These are professionals in other fields that tailor their expertise to health care. Think human resources, accounting, program development and others. One of their biggest responsibilities is ensuring that all the departments follow local, state and federal health regulations. To tackle this job, you need to have good organi-



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zational leadership skills and know how to adjust processes in the face of changing regulations and technologies.

HEALTH INFORMATION MANAGER

Each patient generates reams of information about themselves, their conditions and their treatments. Health information managers organize that information into databases, making sure their facilities

abide by industry standards and regulations. They may also make financial plans to see that bills are paid on time, collaborate with human resources, and work with IT on data security.

NURSING HOME ADMINISTRATOR

Our aging population comes with its own set of problems and regulations. Nursing home administrators supervise the clinical activities at nursing

homes, making sure residents receive the best care possible. They hire and supervise staff members, stock medical supplies and handle budgeting. They may also be called upon to manage contract negotiations and to oversee regulatory issues. In some states, you may need to obtain a license.

HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATOR

The needs of a hospital are

different from those of a doctor's office or clinic.

Hospital administrators are trained in ensuring that the patients in their care get the best possible treatment, managing budgets and staff while ensuring that all safety regulations, policies and guidelines are followed.

Hospital administrators may also work in rehabilitation centers and nursing homes, since the needs are similar.

Relaunching Your Career

Health care is such a fast-growing industry that it's attracting people from other career paths who are eager for a new challenge.

You might consider starting out with a career path that only takes an associate's or bachelor's degree, or you may choose to continue on into graduate or medical school as a nontraditional student.

Lala Tanmoy Das is an M.D./Ph.D. candidate in the Weill Cornell/Rockefeller/Sloan Kettering Tri-Institutional MD-PhD program in New York. He wrote about his experience switching careers for the Association of American Medical Colleges. His first job was in the financial services industry, managing revenue systems and clinical data repositories for pharmaceutical companies.

Das used AAMC Virtual Medical School Fairs as a springboard into his second education as a doctor and scientist. He found a local premed adviser who worked with him to navigate academic prerequisites, fill out paperwork and find the perfect program for him.

His previous college — even though he'd graduated seven years earlier — also helped him. Das says that while he avoided it, a postbaccalaure-



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ate program is one route to completing premed requirements, and your old school may be able to help you with that.

You may have to take longer to prepare for the MCAT than a traditional student as you juggle work and family responsibilities, Das says. He

did flashcards during his commute and took advantage of online videos to help him study.

Das also had the complete support of his partner and family. It's important to note that medical school doesn't mean a steady paycheck, and that may be the case for

years. Still, Das doesn't have any regrets.

"I find myself more in love with medicine than I had ever imagined," he wrote. "It is an honor to be part of my patients' lives and help them during their most vulnerable moments."

You may even, like Das,

find that your life experience makes you a better health care professional than the traditional student. You bring with you years of real world experience that makes you an expert in navigating real situations, talking and relating to people, and communicating needs and plans.

What Is Gerontology?

Gerontology is the scientific study of old age, the process of aging and the specific problems of older people.

As the American population ages, gerontologists play an increasingly important role in our society. It's a multidisciplinary study, the Gerontological Society of America says, that combines health care with biology, behavioral and social sciences, psychology, social workers, economists, humanities and other fields. Overall, gerontologists improve the quality of life and promote the well-being of people as they age.

HISTORY OF GERONTOLOGY

The term gerontology was coined in 1903 by Nobel prize winner and aging researcher Elie Metchnikoff, Concordia University of Chicago says. The study of aging gathered steam in 1937, when the Woods Hole Conference discussed the topic of aging, leading to the founding of the Gerontological Society of America.

GERONTOLOGY VS. GERIATRICS

Both fields study aging, but they have different scopes of study. Gerontology deals with the social, mental, emotional, spiritual and physical needs of the aged. It's a holistic approach and concerns itself



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with improving the quality of life for seniors in society. Geriatrics looks at the medical care surrounding seniors. It is focused on the physical aspects of aging. Both disciplines aim to improve the lives of senior citizens.

HOW TO STUDY GERONTOLOGY

Many universities now offer

degrees in gerontology, including as part of their advanced degree programs. You can also start with a bachelor's degree in psychology, nursing or social work, then go on to complete the master's degree in gerontology. With a degree in gerontology, you can work as an occupational therapist, psychologist, sociologist, financial adviser,

family therapist, counselor, social worker, scientist and more. There are also plenty of government jobs and administrative services positions where that degree would be helpful.

Any job where you work specifically with aging populations may benefit from gerontology study.

There's even certification

programs, such as the one offered at UMass Boston. That program focuses on aging equality, meaning equal access to necessary services and living conditions. It's an online program for those who might find a certificate helpful in their career path or for those who want to test the waters before heading into the master's program.



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Remote Health Care Careers

COVID-19 changed American life in many ways, one of them being what work looks like.

For millions of Americans, commuting into the office or working all day in a cubicle is a thing of the past. Instead, they work remotely.

Forbes magazine predicts that even after the pandemic passes, remote work is here to stay. Many people believe it's the key to a better work-life balance and overall satisfaction with their job. It's no different in the health care industry. Even many doctor's offices are now seeing some patients via telehealth and, in some specialties, entire practices have gone remote.

BENEFITS OF WORKING FROM HOME

Remote work allows people to work on their own schedule, letting them complete work in bursts where they are more productive and take breaks and come back when they're not. This leads to a better work-life balance and may reduce health care burnout, which became epidemic during COVID-19. It also gives companies more talent to choose from when you remove geographic boundaries and gives people access to expertise they

wouldn't normally find in their area.

TYPES OF REMOTE HEALTH CARE JOBS

Yes, some doctors and nurses are seeing patients virtually and building their practices on that model. But, as we've seen, there's more to health care than just the people who hold the stethoscope. Patient intake and records, claims management, billing accounting, community relations, marketing, human resources, IT and call center employees can all work virtually.

SECURITY

Health care deals with personal information and a lot of regulations surrounding that information. Companies

who allow employees to work remotely are addressing that with encryption and private network technologies to keep patient information safe.

SUCCESSFUL REMOTE WORK

With the appropriate ground rules, it's possible for health care employees to work remotely safely and productively. Forbes says that it's important for both companies and employees to be clear about expectations, policies and etiquette and to make sure both parties stick to what they promised. Done properly, remote health care work can lead to quicker diagnosis, faster treatment and more successful patient outcomes, along with more flexible and efficient service for the patient.

Occupational Therapy

Occupational therapy involves the assessment of ailments and interventions to develop, recover and maintain meaningful activities for the patient.

Occupational therapists help people to do the things they want to do or need to do through the therapeutic use of every day activities. For example, occupational therapists can help children learn to brush their teeth, help people relearn to walk after an injury, or help older people experiencing cognitive changes learn to live independently.

BECOMING AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

Occupational therapy comes with both educational and licensure requirements that may vary from state to state. In school, the University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences says you will learn hands-on assessment and treatment skills. But it's also good to have great communication skills, be a creative problem-solver, team player and have empathy for clients and patients.

Occupational therapists usually require both an undergraduate and a graduate degree, the university says. It suggests a bachelor's in areas such as biol-

ogy, health science or psychology to avoid taking prerequisite courses before graduate school. In graduate school, you can choose a master's or even a doctoral degree in occupational therapy, which will include fieldwork hours in addition to the licensure exam.

The doctoral degree is well-suited to those interested in advocacy and leadership roles, USA says, and some

schools may offer a post-professional doctoral degree for practicing OTs who want to expand their credentials.

Once you earn your degrees, you will have to pass the National Board of Certification of Occupational Therapy exam to be licensed to practice in the United States. Check with your local authorities to determine state and local licensing requirements.

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSISTANT

If six or seven years of full-time education isn't possible for you, you can still find an occupational therapy career with an associate degree. Occupational therapy assistants help patients in much the same way occupational therapists do, but may not be as involved in designing the interventions as they are in execut-

ing them. They may also be called upon to perform support and administrative functions as needed. It is also regulated in all 50 states, so you will need to get licensed and pass an exam.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts the U.S. will need 30% more occupational therapy assistants by 2030, making it a job that's growing much faster than average.



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Types of Eye Specialists

Opticians, optometrists and ophthalmologists. You may know that all three of those “o” words have to do with eyes, but not what each one does specifically. Fortunately, we’re here to help.

OPTICIANS

Opticians are the technicians who fit eyeglasses, contact lenses and other vision-correction devices. Of these three professions, opticians may be the only ones not addressed as doctor. They cannot give eye exams, diagnose or treat eye diseases or write prescriptions. But they can make sure your glasses are working and fitting just right on your face. Most opticians have one or two years of training and are licensed. Not all states require opticians to be licensed.

OPTOMETRISTS

These are eye health professionals that can perform eye exams and vision tests. They can also prescribe and dispense corrective lenses, detect abnormalities in the eye and prescribe medications for eye diseases. They aren’t medical doctors, though. Optometrists have a doctor of optometry degree, earned in optometry



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school, and focus primarily on vision care, not medical care.

OPHTHALMOLOGISTS

These are true medical doctors that must attend medical school and complete a residency in ophthalmology. They can do everything the optometrist can, but can also practice medicine and perform surgery. They can also treat conditions

such as glaucoma and diagnose and treat eye conditions related to other diseases, such as diabetes. They may also perform plastic surgery on the skin around the eye.

All three of these medical professionals have different roles in keeping your vision 20/20, and they may all work together in the same practice. One isn’t necessarily better

than the other; much depends on your health history and the conditions you’re treating.

Find the right eye doctor for you by asking friends and family members for recommendations. You can also turn to your insurance provider or professional organizations such as the American Optometric Association to find an eye care provider near you.

If, so far, you’ve been lucky enough to just need basic eye exams and vision correction, you could start with an optometrist. They can recommend an ophthalmologist if you need one later one. Both optometrists and ophthalmologists probably have trained and talented opticians in their office that can help you with your vision correction needs.