

# Health Care Careers



# Eyes, Ears, Nose and Throat

In many ways, we experience life through our eyes, ears, noses and throats.

Should you have an issue in these areas, however, there are specialists on standby to make sure yours are in top health. Here's what each of them does:

## EYES

Ophthalmologists, opticians and optometrists have similar-sounding names, but each handles a different area as the main caregivers for our eyes. An optometrist serves as a primary eye doctor. They test eyes and, if needed, provide corrective measures. They also diagnose, manage and treat any eye changes, which often signal more serious health issues. Ophthalmologists also perform surgeries and conduct eye research. Opticians accept prescriptions from optometrists or ophthalmologists and provide corrective vision aids. They're also trained to design and fit eyeglasses and contact lenses.

## EARS

The proper name for an ear, nose and throat doctor is rather unwieldy: an otolaryngologist. That's why they're more commonly referred to simply as ENTs. This specialist manages issues in the head and neck, whether that's medically or surgically. Audiologists study and treat hearing issues



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and disorders, beginning with the common hearing test we're all familiar with. Otolologists or neurotologists focus on the inner ears, auditory nerves and other issues at the base of your skulls.

## NOSES AND THROATS

Otolaryngologists handle maladies of the nasal and sinus cavities, larynx, upper

digestive tract, and esophagus, as well. This includes diagnosing, managing and treating allergies, smell disorders, sinusitis and nasal obstructions. The wide range of tasks handled by ENTs also includes managing voice disorders, tumors or facial trauma, throat diseases and difficulties with swallowing. They even perform certain reconstructive

and cosmetic surgeries.

## RELATED FIELDS

Ear, nose and throat disorders that are related to allergies sometimes require treatment from an immunologist. They focus on issues of the immune system. When it overreacts, we have allergic symptoms – and these symptoms are typically felt in the ears,

nose and throat regions. You may also be referred to a respiratory therapist if you are having trouble smelling or breathing, particularly if the symptoms are related to chronic illnesses like bronchitis or emphysema. These key specialists are trained in cardio-pulmonary medicine and critical care since breathing issues can be life-threatening.

# Health Care Administration

Overseers are critically important as health care continues to grow.

The sprawling health care industry is more than just doctors and nurses. There's a web of related jobs including insurers, regulators and recordkeepers. All of them require administrators to make sure this complex and growing segment continues to run at peak performance. That's why one study predicted that administrator jobs would grow by more than 30% through 2030. Here's a sampling of key positions.

## HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATOR

Hospitals are larger, more complicated operations than a clinic or individual doctor's office, so their administrators must be very good at many things. Their job descriptions start, of course, with ensuring that patients get the best possible care. But they also must manage budgeting, recruit and maintain qualified staff, and ensure that all safety regulations and guidelines are followed. Applicants with a similar skill set may also be sought at nursing homes and rehabilitation centers, which have similar needs.

## HEALTH SERVICES

These are professionals with special skill sets tailored to support health care facilities. This includes accountants,



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human resource specialists, program development coordinators and others. Their principal responsibilities include ensuring that federal, state and local health regulations are met. Top candidates have great leadership and organizational skills, with the ability to smoothly adjust as technology and regulations are updated.

## CLINICAL MANAGER

As the name suggests, these

professionals oversee all operations at a clinic. This may include creating and implementing policy, calling and leading staff meetings, training new employees, managing billing, scheduling treatment, supervising staff and even running entire sub-departments.

## HEALTH INFORMATION

Patients are associated with reams of data, with informa-

tion about treatments and conditions that must be kept safe. These details are needed when making future care decisions, and for accurate billing. The information is also to be kept private by law. Other industry regulations and standards may also be in place. The health information manager may also oversee areas of the billing process, work with human resources and confer with the information-technology

department on data security.

## NURSING HOME

Nursing home administrators oversee clinical activities for our aging population, ensuring patients get the very best care. Duties include hiring and supervising staff, budgeting, medical supplies, contract negotiations and regulatory compliance. A license may be required, depending on which state you live in.

# Pharmacy Tech

If you've picked up a prescription, you have already met one.

Pharmacies come in all sizes these days, as large and small stores, in free-standing buildings or as part of a larger store. They all employ pharmacy technicians to help keep the operation going smoothly. In fact, national chains may hire several per location. Some health systems may also hire pharmacy techs to process prescriptions for their in-house pharmacies. These jobs place pharmacy techs at the forefront of everyday health care, handling one of the industry's most fast-paced and interesting roles.

## WHAT THEY DO

Working under the supervision of a primary pharmacist, pharmacy technicians provide a vital link with patients. They may be asked to confirm dosages with doctors; mix, compound or measure medicine; get approval for a prescription renewal; and deal with customers on a one-on-one basis. Top candidates possess both specific technical knowledge but also customer-service acumen, since they often answer phones and handle the pharmacy cash register. Pharmacy techs may also schedule meetings for pharmacists, or help a patient find their over-the-counter meds elsewhere in the store. This role is often seen as a stepping stone for those who'd one day like to have their own career as a pharma-



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cist, or another related clinical position.

## KEY REQUIREMENTS

Pharmacy technicians used to be trained on the job after applying to a local business. They'd learn labeling, insurance processing and shelf stocking from a pharmacist on staff. In the modern era, pharmacy

techs must usually have a high-school diploma or equivalent and then complete other specialized training. Some companies require a post-secondary pharmacy technology program. Most states take a regulatory role over pharmacy tech, requiring them to pass a special exam and complete other formal training. Candidates with

associate degrees in pharmacy technology usually find themselves in higher demand.

## JOB TRENDS

Job openings for professional liaisons between pharmacists and patients will continue to soar, with nearly 32,000 expected each year over the next decade as others get promoted,

transfer or retire. At the same time, becoming a pharmacy tech remains one of the easiest paths into the health care workforce. An associate degree only takes two years to acquire, and many of these positions don't require it. It's also a stable position, since professional liaisons will always be needed between pharmacists and patients.

# Occupational Therapy

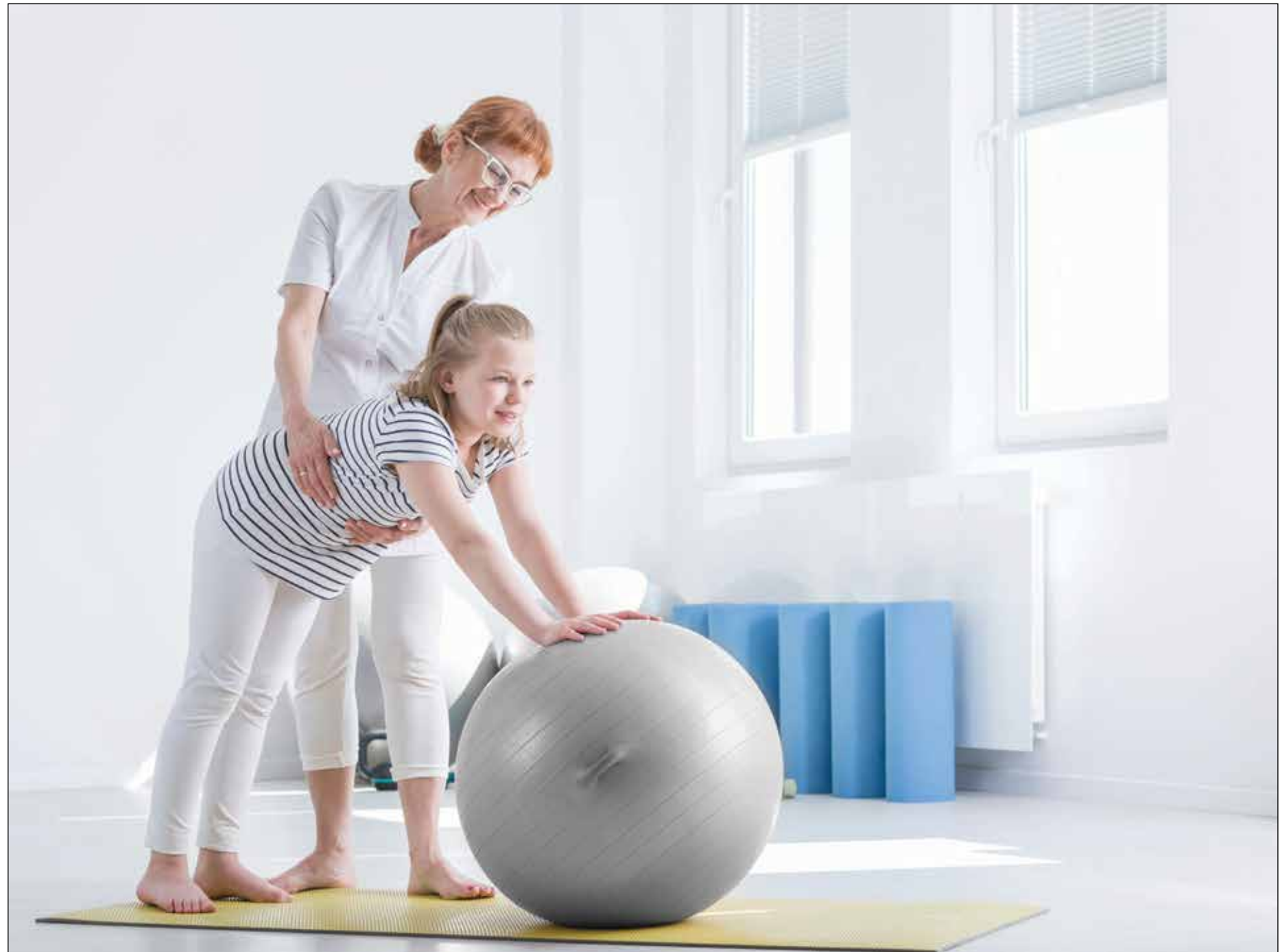
Here's your opportunity to help people recover their mobility.

Occupational therapists assess and treat patients so that they can recover and maintain mobility. This might include helping someone relearn everyday activities after an injury, working with someone with a learning disability, or aiding older patients who want to continue living independently. The job's larger objective is to help clients meet their personal movement goals for daily living and working.

## BECOMING AN OT

Educational and licensing requirements to become an occupational therapist vary from state to state. In general, however, classwork will include a focus on assessment and treatment. The best OTs also have terrific communication skills, are creative problem solvers, love working in a team format, and possess great empathy. Occupational therapists typically graduate with a bachelor's degree in a related subject like health science, biology or psychology and then pursue a post-graduate degree in occupational therapy. Fieldwork is part of the process, as is a licensure exam. Those who are interested in advocacy or agency leadership roles typically go on to earn a doctoral degree.

Passing the National Board



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of Certification of Occupational Therapy exam is required to practice in the U.S. Contact local boards or governing bodies to find out more about additional state and local requirements. Once you've passed, you'll become part of one of the fastest-growing segments of the health care industry. The U.S. Bureau

of Labor Statistics predicts that employment for OTs will grow 12% over the next 10 years, with nearly 10,000 openings expected each year on average through 2032.

## OT ASSISTANT

Thankfully, six or seven years of full-time occupational therapy education isn't

required to join this field. OT assistants help patients in ways that are similar to an occupational therapist, but with only a two-year associate degree required. They are not typically as involved in creating a treatment program, but often play a key role in execution. Administrative and support functions are also usually part

of the job description. OT assistants must likewise pass an exam to earn the required license, and there may be other local requirements. As with occupational therapists, this job is growing faster than average with 30% more OT assistants needed by 2030, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

# Gerontology

As our population ages, science is working hard to understand the process.

Gerontologists are playing an increasingly important role in science, as they study aging, the process of growing old, and problems specific to older people. Their work is multidisciplinary, combining health care, behavioral and social sciences, biology and psychology. Economists, social workers and humanities professionals are also part of gerontology's larger scope. They're working in concert to improve the quality of life and well-being for seniors.

## A LOOK BACK

Nobel prize winner Elie Metchnikoff coined the term gerontology as an aging researcher in the early 1900s at Concordia University in Chicago. But studying the aging didn't really take off until the late '30s when the topic was discussed at a major health care conference.

Founding of the Gerontological Society of America then followed. Fast forward a century, and the UN has predicted that the worldwide population of people aged 60 years or older would double by 2050, when they will officially outnumber those aged 10-24. Older Americans will outnumber children by 2034.



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## DIFFERENT FROM GERIATRICS

Both gerontology and geriatrics study aging, but the scopes are different. Geriatric study focuses on the medical care of seniors, with an emphasis on physical aspects. Gerontology brings in the social, emotional, mental and spiritual needs of the aging, as well. Both seek to help senior citizens, but the more holistic approach of gerontology is designed to create

better overall quality of life.

## STUDYING GERONTOLOGY

Degrees in gerontology are now offered by many universities, including advanced degree pathways. Some students choose to earn a bachelor's degree in a related field like nursing, psychology or social work then pursue a master's degree in gerontology. With this advanced degree in hand,

professional work can follow as a psychologist, occupational therapist, sociologist, nurse, family therapist, social worker or counselor, among others.

Subcategories in the field include biological gerontology, social gerontology and environmental gerontology. Biogerontology studies aging at both the cellular and molecular levels. Social gerontology takes in the social context of aging. Environmental gerontology

focuses on the interaction of our aging population with both physical and social environments. Experts in gerontology are also recruited for government and administrative services positions, but any job description that involves interacting with aging populations will include elements of this degree program. Additional certifications are available, including one that focuses on equality for the aging.

# Eye Specialists

Opticians, optometrists and ophthalmologists each play critical roles.

The main cohort of eye-care specialists have names that start with the letter “o,” and they work hand in hand to protect your sight, but in many cases that’s where the similarities end.

Typically, you will only need an optometrist to handle the basics of eye care. If something goes wrong, they may recommend a medical doctor. Otherwise, a third professional will help you fit your eye-glasses or contact lenses and you will be on your way.

If you don’t have a trusted regular eye specialist, ask family members and friends for their recommendations. Your insurance provider may have more information, as will professional organizations like the American Optometric Association. How much you’ll need one or the other may depend on your individual eye health, even if they work together in the same practice.

Here’s how to tell them all apart.

## OPTOMETRISTS

These eye health professionals perform vision tests and eye exams. They also prescribe and dispense corrective glasses and contacts. If they detect an abnormality, they may prescribe medications or order surgery. Optometrists



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have a doctor’s degree in optometry earned through a professional school, but they are not medical doctors. They focus on vision care, rather than medical care.

## OPHTHALMOLOGISTS

Ophthalmologists must attend medical school, completing a residency in ophthalmology. They are versed in all of the processes of optometry,

but also practice medicine and perform eye surgeries. You will see an ophthalmologist for treatment of eye conditions like glaucoma. They also diagnose and treat conditions that result from other diseases like diabetes. In some cases, they perform plastic surgery around the eyes, as well.

The most common eye disorders and diseases include

glaucoma, macular degeneration, cataracts, refractive errors, diabetic retinopathy, amblyopia and strabismus, among others.

Ophthalmologists play a key role, since the leading causes of low vision and blindness in the United States include several of those same maladies – and they’re all age-related diseases like macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, cat-

aracts and glaucoma.

## OPTICIANS

An optician fits glasses or contact lenses so they work properly. Most of them are licensed, typically after a couple of years of training, but they are not doctors. They cannot diagnose or treat disease, conduct eye exams or write prescriptions. Requirements vary by state.

# Nurse Practitioners

These overlooked caregivers have become central to primary care.



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Nurse practitioners are registered nurses who've attained more specialized training. That's allowed these often-overlooked caregivers to fill needed gaps during an ongoing doctor shortage. They are increasingly relied upon to evaluate injuries, diagnose diseases and prescribe treatments.

As they've moved into the role of primary care clinicians, nurse practitioners have earned key endorsements from the AARP and others. More recently, the Institute of Medicine called on lawmakers to eliminate regulations that limit nurse practitioners' ability to practice to the fullest extent of their training and education.

Now, job openings in this field are expected to see an incredible

45% growth through 2023, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. For those looking to join this exciting field, there's a less costly, shorter process to become a nurse practitioner than the traditional track for doctors.

## THEIR ROLE

Nurse practitioners are part of a cohort known as advanced-practice registered nurses, joining nurse anesthetists, nurse midwives and clinical nurse specialists. Their role in healthcare has become far more central in modern times, often as the first person a patient interacts with. The nurse practitioner discusses medical history, checks vital signs and asks about any changes in general

health. In some situations, they prescribe meds, create a treatment plan and order additional tests. They may refer patients to specialists, as needed, and serve as an important resource in maintaining wellness by helping develop and implement healthier lifestyle regimens and sharing hands-on information.

## JOB REQUIREMENTS

Team-based care has quickly become the norm as the National Center for Workforce Analysis predicts a huge shortfall of primary-care physicians. There could be more than 20,000 openings by 2025, placing nurse practitioners at the center of maintaining wellness. They're often already on

staff, easier to funnel into full-time employment, and provide a more cost-effective way to bolster staff than bringing in more doctors.

## BRIGHT OUTLOOK

Health management and treatment for chronic pain will only become more important as the Baby Boomer generation continues to age. The Affordable Care Act has also widely expanded insurance coverage. The Department of Veterans Affairs has already decided to allow nurse practitioners to practice independently in each of its medical facilities. Expect more and more primary-care facilities to similarly turn to team-based care to fill staffing gaps.