

Healthcare Career Paths

Find the Best Fit for “YOU”

Find your best “fit” among healthcare careers – either in a related field within the same category, or in a different category altogether.

As examples, a pre-medical student may discover after a year or two that his or her strength does not lie in the sciences and changes to a better fit in an allied or educational field; a pre-nursing student who excels in science discovers while doing volunteer work that he or she does not enjoy nursing and switches to pharmacy; or a pre-medical student who excels in science and loves healthcare discovers he or she is uncomfortable working directly with patients and changes to an affiliated field such as biostatistics or epidemiology.

Diagnosing/Treating fields entail direct patient care from exceptionally well-educated practitioners. These fields are usually highly selective/competitive, require significant levels of science/mathematics, require or prefer a completed bachelor’s degree, and require a post-baccalaureate degree.

- Examples: dentists, optometrists, physicians, podiatrists, and veterinarians.

Allied/Associated fields either are allied with or carry out prescribed treatments from diagnosing/treating professionals. These fields require well-educated practitioners and entail direct patient care, usually more hands-on work than in diagnosing/treating fields, and consequently require strong interpersonal skills. These fields are moderately to highly selective/competitive, require moderate to high levels of science/mathematics, and usually begin at the undergraduate level, but can extend to the doctoral level.

- Examples: nurses, dieticians, pharmacists, genetic counselors.

Rehabilitating fields also entail direct, hands-on patient care from well-educated practitioners. They are usually moderately selective/competitive, but can be highly selective/competitive if the number of applicants far exceeds the number of available seats. Some require a completed bachelor’s degree; others begin at the undergraduate level. Most require moderate levels of science/mathematics and strong interpersonal skills.

- Examples: audiologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, recreational therapists.

Assisting/Adjunct fields support other health professionals and usually entail primarily either direct patient care or hands-on applications. These fields are minimally to moderately selective/competitive and usually require minimal levels of science/mathematics. Some can be completed with just a certificate; others require an associate’s degree, a bachelor’s degree, or even a bachelor’s degree plus certificate.

- Examples: technologists, technicians, assistants, or aides.

Educational fields assist patients and people with their health and with the healthcare system. Selectivity depends upon the program and degree sought, ranging from associate's to bachelor's degrees, post-baccalaureate certificates, and graduate-level degrees. These fields require little to no science/mathematics, but some science/mathematics usually provides an advantage. Some require a background in education or counseling, and a strong foundation in the humanities or social sciences is helpful. Strong interpersonal skills are usually essential.

- Examples: dietary managers, biomedical writers, mental health workers, health educators, health science librarians.

Administrative fields assist or manage health organizations, not individual patients. Selectivity depends upon the program and degree sought. Degrees are offered at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Courses in science are advantageous but not usually required. Some degrees require a background in business, which includes mathematics, and most require a strong foundation in the social sciences.

- Examples: nursing home directors, geriatric care managers, health wellness coordinators, hospital public relations officers, quality assurance directors, medical secretaries, admitting officers.

Affiliated fields are independent but related to health care. These fields vary widely: some require direct patient care while others entail no patient care; some are science-based while others are based more in the social sciences; some are highly selective, others minimally selective. Most fields require a completed bachelor's degree plus a graduate-level degree, often a Ph.D.

- Examples: biomedical engineers, biostatisticians, social workers, epidemiologists, athletic trainers, environmental health scientists.

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<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/Pre-Health.htm>

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