

Physician (MD/DO)



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Physicians examine patients; obtain medical histories; order, perform, and interpret diagnostic tests; and prescribe and administer treatment for people suffering from injury or disease. They counsel patients about illness, injuries, health conditions, and preventive healthcare (diet/fitness, smoking cessation, etc.). They can also conduct medical research, teach, and run medical centers.



Health Educator (CHES)



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Health educators may develop community-wide education initiatives on health topics ranging from nutrition and fitness to injury and disease prevention. They may also engage in:

- helping to stop the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, such as cervical cancer and HIV/AIDS.
- helping young people recognize and avoid the dangers of unprotected sex, alcohol abuse, and drug abuse.
- reducing obesity and related health problems in youth and adult populations.
- improving the quality of life for the growing population of seniors.
- investigating and implementing health promotion programs, such as smoking-cessation initiatives, water and sanitation projects, and occupational safety courses.



Social Worker (LSW, LMSW, LCSW)



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A social worker's approach to care is oriented toward solving problems and promoting positive social change. Professional social workers respond to and help prevent crises, and they counsel individuals, families, groups, and communities on how to cope with the stresses of everyday life. They often help people with socioeconomic disadvantages, including severe poverty, unemployment, discrimination, or inadequate housing. They also help people who have serious illnesses, disabilities, or substance abuse problems, as well as families with serious domestic conflicts, sometimes involving child abuse or intimate partner violence.



Psychologist



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Psychologists traditionally treat patients with mental and emotional problems, but they also serve as scientists researching the phenomenon of human (and nonhuman) behavior. They study how human beings relate not only to each other but also to machines, and they work to improve these relationships. In particular, they concentrate on behaviors that affect the mental and emotional health and mental functioning of healthy human beings.



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Optometrist (OD)



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Optometrists diagnose and treat the eyes, prescribe medications, perform certain surgical procedures, provide vision therapy and low-vision rehabilitation, and assist patients with eyeglasses and contact lenses. They counsel patients regarding surgical and nonsurgical options to meet their visual needs. ODs also diagnose systemic conditions that have eye-related symptoms (i.e., diabetes or high blood pressure) and refer patients to other health practitioners, as needed.



Nurse Practitioner (NP)



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Nurse practitioners are registered nurses with advanced education that prepares them to take on management positions within the field. Nurse practitioners also are qualified to provide basic primary care. An NP, working under the supervision of a physician, can do much of what the physician does. Some NPs with advanced training can prescribe medications and diagnose and treat common acute illnesses and injuries.



Registered Nurse (RN)



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Registered nurses provide direct patient care; observe, assess, and record symptoms; administer medications; and assist physicians during treatment and examination. Nurses can specialize in areas such as emergency room, operating room, or pediatric nursing with additional training. RNs must graduate from a nursing program and pass a national licensing examination.



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Audiologist and Speech Language Pathologist



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Audiologists determine if a person has hearing loss and what type of loss it is. If a person can benefit from using hearing aids or other assistive listening systems, the audiologist can assist with the selection, fitting, and training in their effective use. Speech language pathologists evaluate speech, language, cognitive communication, and swallowing skills of adults and children, and then determine what problems exist and the best treatment. A degree in communication sciences and disorders is required, which may be acquired at the undergraduate or graduate level.



Registered Dietitian (RD)



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Dietitians and nutritionists plan food and nutrition programs and supervise the preparation and serving of meals. They help prevent and treat illnesses by promoting healthy eating habits and suggesting diet modifications. Dietitians run food-service systems for institutions such as hospitals and schools, promote sound eating habits through education, and conduct research. To become an RD, you must complete an undergraduate degree (at minimum) or a 2-year post-baccalaureate degree in dietetics, foods and nutrition, or a related field.



Physical Therapist (PT)



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Physical therapists most often work with patients who are recovering from an accident, injury, or ailment (such as a stroke) or who have a disability that affects their strength or mobility. PTs practice in hospitals, clinics, and private offices and consult with other healthcare professionals, including physicians, nurses, educators, and social workers. Some PTs specialize in areas such as sports, pediatric, neurologic, or geriatric physical therapy. Physical therapists in every state must graduate from an accredited physical therapist educational program and be licensed before they can practice.



Occupational Therapist (OT)



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Occupational therapists work with people of all ages who have suffered from some type of injury, illness, or other impairment that hinders them from conducting basic work or life tasks. Occupational therapists provide exercises and sometimes orthotic devices to help these patients improve their life and work functioning. Some OTs specialize in areas such as pediatrics, neurology, burns, or geriatrics. Occupational therapists undergo a training program similar to the one physical therapists complete. In order to sit for the national certification exam administered by the American Occupational Therapy Certification Board, a person must have a master's or doctoral degree in occupational therapy.



Pharmacist (RPh, PharmD)



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Pharmacists dispense drugs prescribed by physicians and other health practitioners and provide information to patients about medications and their use. They advise physicians and other health practitioners on the selection, dosages, interactions, and side effects of medications. Most pharmacists work in a community setting, such as a retail drug store, or in a hospital or clinic. Pharmacists in community or retail pharmacies counsel patients and answer questions about prescription drugs. They also provide information about over-the-counter drugs. A PharmD (doctor of pharmacy) requires at least 2 years of specific preprofessional (undergraduate) coursework, followed by 4 years of professional study.



Physician Assistant (PA)



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A PA always works under a physician's supervision, though in understaffed facilities where a primary-care physician may not be available every day, a PA might handle all the patient care. More often, a PA will interview patients to record their medical histories, give basic physicals, interpret lab results, and make tentative diagnoses to confirm later with a physician. Many PAs also follow up with patients to monitor their reaction to drugs, teach them about nutrition, and consult with their family members. PA is a master's degree program.

