

Registered Nurses

(All information, except UB degree program information, is from the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2004-2005 Occupational Outlook Handbook.)

- **Significant Points**
- **Employment, Job Outlook & Earnings**
- **Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement**
- **UB Graduate Programs:**
 - [Acute Nurse Practitioner \(MS & Advanced Cert.\)](#)
 - [Adult Health Nursing \(MS & Advanced Cert.\)](#)
 - [Family Nurse Practitioner \(MS & Advanced Cert.\)](#)
 - [Geriatric Nurse Practitioner \(MS & Advanced Cert.\)](#)
 - [Maternal and Women's Health Nursing \(MS & Advanced Cert.\)](#)
 - [Nurse Anesthetist \(MS\)](#)
 - [Nursing \(DNS\)](#)
 - [Pediatric Nurse Practitioner \(MS & Advanced Cert.\)](#)
 - [Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing \(Advanced Cert.\)](#)
- **UB Undergraduate Programs:**
 - [BS Nursing \(RN Track\)](#)
 - [BS/MS Nursing](#)

Significant Points

- Registered nurses constitute the largest healthcare occupation, with 2.3 million jobs.
- More new jobs are expected to be created for registered nurses than for any other occupation.
- Job opportunities are expected to be very good.
- The three major educational paths to registered nursing are a bachelor's degree, an associate degree, and a diploma.

Employment

As the largest healthcare occupation, registered nurses held about 2.3 million jobs in 2002. Almost 3 out of 5 jobs were in hospitals, in inpatient and outpatient departments. Others worked in offices of physicians, nursing care facilities, home healthcare services, employment services, government agencies, and outpatient care centers. The remainder worked mostly in social assistance agencies and educational services, public and private. About 1 in 5 RNs worked part time.

Job Outlook

Job opportunities for RNs are expected to be very good. Employment of registered nurses is expected to [grow faster than the average](#) for all occupations through 2012, and because the occupation is very large, many new jobs will result. In fact, more new jobs are expected to be created for RNs than for any other occupation. Thousands of job openings also will result from the need to replace experienced nurses who leave the occupation, especially as the median age of the registered nurse population continues to rise.

Faster-than-average growth will be driven by technological advances in patient care, which permit a greater number of medical problems to be treated, and an increasing emphasis on preventive care. In addition, the number of older people, who are much more likely than younger people to need nursing care, is projected to grow rapidly.

Employers in some parts of the country are reporting difficulty in attracting and retaining an adequate number of RNs, due primarily to an aging RN workforce and insufficient nursing school enrollments. Imbalances between the supply of, and demand for, qualified workers should spur efforts to attract and retain qualified RNs. For example, employers may restructure workloads, improve compensation and working conditions, and subsidize training or continuing education.

Employment in hospitals, the largest sector, is expected to grow more slowly than in most other healthcare sectors. While the intensity of nursing care is likely to increase, requiring more nurses per patient, the number of inpatients (those who remain in the hospital for more than 24 hours) is not likely to increase much. Patients are being discharged earlier and more procedures are being done on an outpatient basis, both inside and outside hospitals. Rapid growth is expected in hospital outpatient facilities, such as those providing same-day surgery, rehabilitation, and chemotherapy.

An increasing proportion of sophisticated procedures, which once were performed only in hospitals, are being performed in physicians' offices and in outpatient care centers, such as freestanding ambulatory surgical and emergency centers. Accordingly, employment is expected to grow faster than average in these places as healthcare in general expands.

Employment in nursing care facilities is expected to grow faster than average due to increases in the number of elderly, many of whom require long-term care. In addition, the financial pressure on hospitals to discharge patients as soon as possible should produce more admissions to nursing care facilities. Job growth also is expected in units that provide specialized long-term rehabilitation for stroke and head injury patients, as well as units that treat Alzheimer's victims.

Employment in home healthcare is expected to increase rapidly in response to the growing number of older persons with functional disabilities, consumer preference for care in the home, and technological advances that make it possible to bring increasingly complex treatments into the home. The type of care demanded will require nurses who are able to perform complex procedures.

In evolving integrated healthcare networks, nurses may rotate among various employment settings. Because jobs in traditional hospital nursing positions are no longer the only option, RNs will need to be flexible. Opportunities should be excellent, particularly for nurses with advanced education and training.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of registered nurses were \$48,090 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$40,140 and \$57,490. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$33,970, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$69,670. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of registered nurses in 2002 were as follows:

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| Employment services | \$55,980 |
| General medical and surgical hospitals | 49,190 |
| Home health care services | 45,890 |
| Offices of physicians | 44,870 |
| Nursing care facilities | 43,850 |

Many employers offer flexible work schedules, childcare, educational benefits, and bonuses.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

In all States and the District of Columbia, students must graduate from an approved nursing program and pass a national licensing examination in order to obtain a nursing license. Nurses may be licensed in more than one State, either by examination, by the endorsement of a license issued by another State, or through a multi-State licensing agreement. All States require periodic renewal of licenses, which may involve continuing education.

There are three major educational paths to registered nursing: a bachelor's of science degree in nursing (BSN), an associate degree in Nursing (ADN), and a diploma. BSN programs, offered by colleges and universities, take about 4 years to complete. In 2002, 678 nursing programs offered degrees at the bachelor's level. ADN programs, offered by community and junior colleges, take about 2 to 3 years to complete. About 700 RN programs in 2002 were at the ADN level. Diploma programs, administered in hospitals, last about 3 years. Only a small and declining number of programs offer diplomas. Generally, licensed graduates of any of the three types of educational programs qualify for entry-level positions as staff nurses.

Many ADN- and diploma-educated nurses later enter bachelor's programs to prepare for a broader scope of nursing practice. Often, they can find a staff nurse position and then take advantage of tuition reimbursement benefits to work toward a BSN by completing one of many RN-to-BSN programs.

Accelerated BSN programs also are available for individuals who have a bachelor's or higher degree in another field and who are interested in moving into nursing. In 2002, more than 110 of these programs were available. Accelerated BSN programs last 12 to 18 months and provide the fastest route to a BSN for individuals who already hold a degree. Accelerated master's degree programs in nursing also are available and take about 3 years to complete.

Individuals considering nursing should carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of enrolling in a BSN program, because, if they do, their advancement opportunities usually are broader. In fact, some career paths are open only to nurses with bachelor's or advanced degrees. A bachelor's degree often is necessary for administrative positions and is a prerequisite for admission to graduate nursing programs in research, consulting, teaching, or a clinical specialization.

Nursing education includes classroom instruction and supervised clinical experience in hospitals and other healthcare facilities. Students take courses in anatomy, physiology, microbiology, chemistry, nutrition, psychology and other behavioral sciences, and nursing. Course work also includes the liberal arts.

Supervised clinical experience is provided in hospital departments such as pediatrics, psychiatry, maternity, and surgery. A growing number of programs include clinical experience in nursing care facilities, public health departments, home health agencies, and ambulatory clinics.

Nurses should be caring, sympathetic, responsible, and detail oriented. They must be able to direct or supervise others, correctly assess patients' conditions, and determine when consultation is required. They need emotional stability to cope with human suffering, emergencies, and other stresses.

Experience and good performance can lead to promotion to more responsible positions. In management, nurses can advance to assistant head nurse or head nurse and, from there, to assistant director, director, and vice president. Increasingly, management-level nursing positions require a graduate or an advanced degree in nursing or health services administration. They also require leadership, negotiation skills, and good judgment. Graduate programs preparing executive-level nurses usually last about 2 years.

Within patient care, nurses can move into a nursing specialty such as clinical nurse specialist, nurse practitioner, certified nurse midwife, or certified registered nurse anesthetist. These positions require about 2 years of graduate education leading to a master's degree.

Some nurses move into the business side of health care. Their nursing expertise and experience on a healthcare team equip them with the ability to manage ambulatory, acute, home health, and chronic care services. Employers—including hospitals, insurance companies, pharmaceutical manufacturers, and managed care organizations, among others—need RNs for health planning and development, marketing, consulting, policy development, and quality assurance. Other nurses work as college and university faculty or conduct research.