

Careers in nursing

Nurses are in high demand. Here's how to become one.

INTERVIEWED BY ADAM BURROUGHS

There is a very high demand for registered nurses (RN), both in Northeast Ohio and nationally. "Nurses comprise the largest segment of the health care workforce and there is a shortage of qualified nurses to meet increasing demands in the region and across the country," says Vivian Yates, Ph.D., dean of the Division of Nursing Education at Cuyahoga Community College.

She says the Cleveland Hospital Association has projected that by 2020, there will be a shortage of 3,500 nurses in 23 Northeast Ohio counties. Just in the Cleveland area there is a shortage of 750 nurses. And nationally, it's estimated that there will be 32,000 open positions for nurses by 2020.

Smart Business spoke with Yates about the nursing profession and what those interested in this career field must do to get their start.

Why are there so many job openings projected in the nursing field?


There are a lot of reasons for the nursing shortage. Among them is that baby boomers, as they age and their life expectancy increases, are entering the health care system in larger numbers. More nurses will be needed to take care of that population.

In the nursing industry, there is a high number of retirements occurring. Nationally, half of all working nurses are over the age of 50, so it's anticipated that there will continue to be a large number of job vacancies to fill.

Also there are now a wealth of alternative career opportunities for women that have opened up in the past two to three decades. In the past, nursing and teaching were the primary career options for women. Now they have many more opportunities to excel in other fields.

VIVIAN YATES, Ph.D.
Dean, Division of Nursing Education
Cuyahoga Community College

vivian.yates@tri-c.edu
(216) 987-4067

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Demand for nurses is coming from across the health care industry. Traditionally, most nurses were employed in hospitals. But now that more of the older population desires to live in their homes longer, there is an increased need for nurses in home care, community care, long-term care and ambulatory care. Additionally, changes in health care policy are affecting how and where nurses are utilized.

What skills do health care organizations looking for from newly graduated RNs?

Nurses should be able to perform health histories and health assessments, interpret patient information and make decisions about needed actions, counsel and educate patients, provide health promotion information, perform health care interventions and coordinate patient care in collaboration with other health care professionals. Additionally, health care organizations are looking for nurses with good decision-making and critical-thinking skills. They must be able to assess a situation and make critical decisions on the spot.

What would put someone in the best position to succeed as an RN long term?

Nursing school is the place to start for those who want to become an RN.

In the past, a diploma in nursing through hospital-based schools of nursing was

the most common route. Today the most popular options for nursing education are to earn an associate degree through a community or technical college, which prepares nurses for a defined technical scope of practice, or a bachelor of science degree in nursing through a four-year college or university. The bachelor's degree prepares graduates to engage in a broad scope of practice across all health care settings.

Those who want to specialize in a specific area of health care will need a graduate degree in nursing — either a master's, Ph.D., or Doctor of Nursing Practice.

What should someone considering a career as an RN understand about the profession?

Candidates must be comfortable in a health care environment. These settings can be demanding, so it's important for them to have an understanding of the expectations of the nursing profession.

Additionally, nursing candidates should sharpen their math and science skills, which are the foundation of nursing education. Some may need to take additional classes to be sure those skills are adequate.

Nursing is an exciting career with diverse opportunities and great earning potential for both men and women. Nursing provides an opportunity to make a direct impact on the lives of others. ●