

# Registered Nurse

## **Professional Activities**

Registered nurses (RNs), regardless of specialty or work setting, treat patients, educate patients and the public about various medical conditions, and provide advice and emotional support to patients' family members. RNs record patients' medical histories and symptoms help perform diagnostic tests and analyze results, operate medical machinery, administer treatment and medications, and help with patient follow-up and rehabilitation.

RNs teach patients and their families how to manage their illnesses or injuries, explaining post-treatment home care needs; diet, nutrition, and exercise programs; and self-administration of medication and physical therapy. Some RNs may work to promote general health by educating the public on warning signs and symptoms of disease. RNs also might run general health screening or immunization clinics, blood drives, and public seminars on various conditions.

When caring for patients, RNs establish a care plan or contribute to an existing plan. Plans may include numerous activities, such as administering medication, including careful checking of dosages and avoiding interactions; starting, maintaining, and discontinuing intravenous (IV) lines for fluid, medication, blood, and blood products; administering therapies and treatments; observing the patient and recording those observations; and consulting with physicians and other healthcare clinicians. Some RNs provide direction to licensed practical nurses and nursing aides regarding patient care. RNs with advanced educational preparation and training may perform diagnostic and therapeutic procedures and may have prescriptive authority.

Most RNs work as staff nurses, providing critical health care services along with physicians, surgeons, and other health care practitioners. However, some RNs choose to become advanced practice nurses, who often are considered primary health care practitioners and work independently or in collaboration with physicians. For example, clinical nurse specialists provide direct patient care and expert consultations in one of many of the nursing specialties listed above. Nurse anesthetists administer anesthesia, monitor patient's vital signs during surgery, and provide post-anesthesia care. Nurse midwives provide primary care to women, including gynecological exams, family planning advice, prenatal care, assistance in labor and delivery, and neonatal care. Nurse practitioners provide basic preventive health care to patients, and increasingly serve as primary and specialty care providers in mainly medically underserved areas. The most common areas of specialty for nurse practitioners are family practice, adult practice, women's health, pediatrics, acute care, and gerontology; however, there are many other specialties. In most States, advanced practice nurses can prescribe medications.

Some nurses have jobs that require little or no direct patient care, but still require an active RN license. Forensics nurses participate in the scientific investigation and treatment of abuse victims, violence, criminal activity, and traumatic accident. Infection control nurses identify, track, and control infectious outbreaks in healthcare facilities and develop programs for outbreak prevention and response to biological terrorism. Nurse educators plan, develop, implement, and evaluate educational programs and curricula for the professional development of student nurses and RNs. Nurse informatics's manage and communicate nursing data and information to improve decision making by consumers, patients, nurses, and other healthcare providers. RNs also may work as healthcare consultants, public policy advisors, pharmaceutical and medical supply researchers and salespersons, and medical writers and editors.

Most RNs work in well-lit, comfortable healthcare facilities. Home health and public health nurses travel to patients' homes, schools, community centers, and other sites. RNs may spend considerable time walking, bending, stretching, and standing. Patients in hospitals and nursing care facilities require 24-hour care; consequently, nurses in these institutions may work nights, weekends, and holidays. RNs also may be on call—available to work on short notice. Nurses who work in offices, schools, and other settings that do not provide 24-hour care are more likely to work regular business hours.

RNs may be in close contact with individuals who have infectious diseases and with toxic, harmful, or potentially hazardous compounds, solutions, and medications. RNs must observe rigid, standardized guidelines to guard against disease and other dangers, such as those posed by radiation, accidental needle sticks, chemicals used to sterilize instruments, and anesthetics. In addition, they are vulnerable to back injury when moving patients.

### **Educational Requirements**

There are three typical 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. ADN programs, offered by community and junior colleges, take about 2 to 3 years to complete. Diploma programs, administered in hospitals, last about 3 years. Generally, licensed graduates of any of the three types of educational programs qualify for entry-level positions as a staff nurse. There are hundreds of registered nursing programs that result in an ADN or BSN; however, there are relatively few diploma programs.

In all States, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories, students must graduate from an approved nursing program and pass a national licensing examination, known as the National Council Licensure Examination, or NCLEX-RN, in order to obtain a nursing license. Other eligibility requirements for licensure vary by State. Contact your State's board of nursing for details.

Individuals considering a career in nursing should carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of enrolling in each type of education program. Advancement opportunities may be more limited for ADN and diploma holders compared to RNs who obtain a BSN or higher. Individuals who complete a bachelor's degree receive more training in areas such as communication, leadership, and critical thinking, all of which are becoming more important as nursing practice becomes more complex. Additionally, bachelor's degree programs offer more clinical experience in nonhospital settings. A bachelor's or higher degree is often necessary for administrative positions, research, consulting, and teaching.

Many RNs with an ADN or diploma later enter bachelor's degree programs to prepare for a broader scope of nursing practice. Often, they can find an entry-level position and then take advantage of tuition reimbursement benefits to work toward a BSN by completing an RN-to-BSN program. Accelerated master's degree in nursing (MSN) programs also are available. They typically take 3-4 years to complete full time and result in the award of both the BSN and MSN.

There are education programs available for people interested in switching to a career in nursing as well. Individuals who already hold a bachelor's degree in another field may enroll in an accelerated BSN program. Accelerated BSN programs last 12 to 18 months and provide the fastest route to a BSN for individuals who already hold a degree. MSN programs also are available for individuals who hold a bachelor's or higher degree in another field; master's degree programs usually last 2 years. All four advanced practice nursing specialties

require at least a master's degree. Most programs last about 2 years and require a BSN degree and some programs require at least 1 to 2 years of clinical experience as an RN for admission.

All nursing education programs include 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. Coursework also includes the liberal arts for ADN and BSN students.

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

### **Academic Programs**

[Aurora University](#)

[Benedictine University](#)

[Black Hawk College](#)

[Blessing Rieman College of](#)

[Nursing](#)

[Bradley University](#)

[Carl Sandburg College](#)

[Chamberlain College of Nursing-](#)

[Addison Campus](#)

[Chicago State University](#)

[College of DuPage](#)

[College of Lake County](#)

[Danville Area Community College](#)

[Dominican University](#)

[Eastern Illinois University](#)

[Elgin Community College](#)

[Elmhurst College](#)

[Governors State University](#)

[Graham Hospital School of Nursing](#)

[Harper College](#)

[Harry S Truman College](#)

[Heartland Community College](#)

[Illinois Central College](#)

[Illinois State University](#)

[Illinois Valley Community College](#)

[Illinois Wesleyan University](#)

[John A. Logan College](#)

[John Wood Community College](#)

[Joliet Junior College](#)

[Kankakee Community College](#)

[Kaskaskia College](#)

[Kishwaukee College](#)

[Knox College](#)

[Lake Land College](#)

[Lakeview College of Nursing](#)

[Lewis and Clark Community](#)

[College](#)

[Lewis University](#)

[Loyola University Chicago](#)

[McHenry County College](#)

[McKendree University](#)

[Methodist College of Nursing](#)

[Millikin University](#)

[Monmouth College](#)

[Moraine Valley Community](#)

[College](#)

[Morton College](#)

[North Park University](#)

[Northern Illinois University](#)

[Oakton Community College](#)

[Olivet Nazarene University](#)

[Parkland College](#)

[Prairie State College](#)

[Quincy University](#)

[Rend Lake College](#)

[Richland Community College](#)

[Robert Morris University Illinois](#)

[Rock Valley College](#)

[Rockford University](#)

[Rush University](#)

[Saint Anthony College of Nursing](#)

[Saint Francis Medical Center](#)

[College of Nursing](#)

[Saint Xavier University](#)

[Sauk Valley Community College](#)

[Shawnee Community College](#)

[Southern Illinois University](#)

[Edwardsville](#)

[Southeastern Illinois College](#)

[Southwestern Illinois College](#)

[South Suburban College](#)

[Spoon River College](#)

[Trinity Christian College](#)

[Trinity College of Nursing and](#)

[Health Sciences](#)

[Triton College](#)

[University of Illinois at Chicago](#)

[University of St Francis](#)

[Waubensee Community College](#)

[Western Illinois University](#)

### **Employment/Salary Outlook**

Growth will be driven by technological advances in patient care, which permit a greater number of health problems to be treated, and by 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.

Job opportunities for RNs in all specialties are expected to be excellent. In addition, all four advanced practice specialties—clinical nurse specialists, nurse practitioners, midwives, and anesthetists—will be in high demand, particularly in medically underserved areas such as inner cities and rural areas. Relative to physicians, these

RNs increasingly serve as lower-cost primary care providers. In fact, registered nurses are projected to create the second largest number of new jobs among all occupations. 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.

### State and National Wages

Location	Pay Period	2021		
		Low	Median	High
United States	Hourly	\$22.58	\$37.31	\$57.81
	Annual	\$59,450	\$77,600	\$120,250
Illinois	Hourly	\$28.67	\$37.30	\$48.39
	Annual	\$59,640	\$77,580	\$100,650

### State and National Trends

United States	Employment		Percent Change	<a href="#">Job Openings</a> <sup>1</sup>
	2021	2031		
Registered Nurses	3,130,600	3,326,000	6	203,200
Illinois	Employment		Percent Change	<a href="#">Job Openings</a> <sup>1</sup>
	2020	2030		
Registered Nurses	136,640	142,890	+5%	7,870

<sup>1</sup>Job Openings refers to the average annual job openings due to growth and net replacement.

### Professional Organizations

American Nurses Association ([nursingworld.org](http://nursingworld.org))

American Association of Colleges of Nursing ([aacnnursing.org](http://aacnnursing.org))

National League for Nursing ([nln.org](http://nln.org))

### References

*Occupational Outlook Handbook*, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics  
(<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/registered-nurses.htm>)

O\*NET OnLine (<https://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/29-1141.00>)

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