

Career Focus on...

# Health Careers

## “Health” Yourself to a Great Career!

When you work in health care, you play a key role in some of the most important aspects of the human experience: illness and recovery, life and death. Caring for others can be exciting and rewarding if you find a health career that is right for you. There are many different kinds of jobs in health care. Examples include rehabilitation, surgical technology, medical assisting, nursing, nutrition and fitness, diagnostic services, imaging technology, dental hygiene, and much, much more. Preparing for and working in a health care career demands a significant commitment. Therefore, if you're interested in a health career, you need to make a wise and informed decision. You need to spend a lot of time learning about the different career options as well as your strengths and challenges, likes and dislikes.

Quinsigamond Community College offers the following health care programs: complementary health, dental assisting, dental hygiene, emergency medical services (emergency medical technician intermediate and paramedic), LPN-ADN transition, medical support specialist, nurse education, occupational therapy assistant, paramedic technology, practical nursing, radiological technology, respiratory care, surgical technology, and general studies health care option.

## What's so great about a career in health?

- While many industries are shrinking, the health care field is growing rapidly. In fact, 10 of the 20 fastest growing occupations in the United States are in health care.
- Health care will generate 3.2 million new wage and salary jobs between 2008 and 2018, more than any other industry, largely in response to rapid growth in the elderly population.
- Many jobs in health services require less than 4 years of college.
- With a career in health care, you can live and work almost anywhere in the U.S.! Most regions of the country have a strong need for a wide range of health care professionals.
- Entry-level health care workers can earn from \$15 to \$50 an hour!

## Is a health career right for you?

Before you pursue a career in health you need to think about your abilities, needs and goals. Here are some questions that can help:

### **Do you want to interact with patients?**

Most health care professionals work directly with patients. Examples include nurses, emergency medical technicians, occupational therapists, respiratory therapists, lab technologists, medical coders, and physicians. If you're considering a career where you have a lot of interaction with patients, a warm and caring personality is important.

Other health professionals that have limited contact with patients include medical technologists, billers, pathologists, and other health care professionals who develop detailed reports for doctors to analyze and research test and lab results.

### **Do you do well in science and math?**

Many health careers require a strong science background and a reasonable aptitude for math. Almost all health careers require some laboratory science and math. Some programs, such as pharmacy, nutrition, chiropractic, and medical school require more intensive work in the hard sciences, such as chemistry, biology, and even physics. It's important to be realistic about your commitment to studying and succeeding in these subject areas.

### **How do you feel about working in a health care setting?**

In many (but not all) health careers, you will spend a significant amount of time with people who are sick, disabled or dying. In some health careers, you need to be comfortable touching people or dealing with difficult physical or emotional issues. Keep in mind that working in health care is not quite as glamorous as it may look on some of your favorite television shows! How do you feel about working with a wide variety of people? Have you had any experience working in a clinical setting? If not, it would be

wise to get some now so that you have more of an understanding of what's involved. You may want to conduct informational interviews with people who are working in the field, visit health care settings and even look for paid employment or volunteer opportunities to familiarize yourself with health careers.

Health professionals work in a wide variety of settings. What settings would appeal to you? Would you enjoy working at an Health Maintenance Organization (HMO), hospital, community health center, private practice office, long-term health care facility, or in a patient's home?

### **Do you like to work with a team?**

Patients usually require help from a team of health care professionals. Collaboration and good communication ensure that patients receive proper care and treatment. If you decide to choose a health career, it's important to be a team player.

### **What other skills and strengths would be required?**

Different health careers require different skills and personality traits. However, most health careers require the following:

- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills
- Maturity and responsibility
- Critical thinking skills
- Attention to detail and conscientiousness
- Some level of technical or mathematical skills
- Emotional stability

Think about why these traits are so important. Patients' well-being and lives depend on high quality care!

### **Would working in a health career involve physical risks?**

Some health careers involve certain physical risks. For example, if involved with direct patient care, you may have to lift patients and equipment, increasing your risk of back strain. Or you may have to guard against exposure to radiation, harmful chemicals, and infectious diseases such as hepatitis, HIV, and tuberculosis. If involved in house calls, you could be exposed to the possibility of accidents on the road or in the home, as well as overexertion. Are you physically and emotionally prepared to handle the risks you may be exposed to in a particular health career?

Because of the physical demands associated with providing health care services to patients, many health career programs have established technical performance standards. For the technical standards associated with QCC Health Programs, please see "Technical Performance Standards" within the QCC College Catalog.

### **Important Requirements**

Students in some health care programs must anticipate and plan for additional expenses for:

- clinical uniforms
- professional liability insurance
- standardized testing
- CPR certification (through Red Cross or American Health Association)
- health immunizations
- physical examinations, which may include drug testing

All uniforms, insurances, certifications, testing, immunizations, and examinations are required at the student's expense.

Additionally, a Criminal Offender Records Information (CORI) and/or Sexual Offender Records Information (SORI) check, as well as fingerprinting, may be required of students enrolled in specific health programs. Students with a criminal conviction may not be able to attend community facilities or fieldwork assignments and so would be unable to complete the program. A criminal conviction may affect a person's ability to take any licensure examination or certification or attain state licensure.

Refer to the QCC College Catalog for further details, as well as complete and up-to-date program requirements.

### **Do you want to keep learning?**

In order to provide high quality patient care, you will need to stay informed about the most recent developments in your field. You may attend classes, seminars, conferences, and read current literature throughout your career in health care.

## **What type of work environment would fit your lifestyle?**

When considering a health career, you should also think about the lifestyle you want. What work hours would work best for you? Some health professionals regularly work nights, weekends, holidays, and/or overtime, while others have a more standard 5-day-per-week schedule. Still, others have flexible or part-time schedules. Also consider if you want a demanding and fast paced job, or a job that requires adapting to frequent change. Think about how your career will fit in with your other responsibilities.

Balance is important for your physical and emotional health, as well as your success in school, work, and family life. So when considering a health program or career, be realistic about how many things you can successfully juggle. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- What are my current priorities (may include work, caring for children or other family members, and staying healthy)?
- Can I schedule classes that will fit in with my work and family schedule?
- Do I have the support I need (emotional, family, financial, employer) to succeed in school and my other responsibilities?
- How many hours can I seriously devote to uninterrupted study?

Though it can be tempting to try to “do it all,” it’s very difficult to do everything successfully. So think realistically and plan carefully!

## **Have you talked with people working in the field?**

Before you begin any program of study or career, you need to be well-informed. Reading or thinking about a health career can be very different than working in one. To make a well-informed decision, you need real exposure to your occupation of interest.

One way to get that exposure is to talk to one or more persons who work in a career that interests you. This is called informational interviewing, and it consists of setting up a time to sit down with a health care professional and ask lots of questions. Examples of questions include:

- Could you describe what a typical work day is like for you?
- What are some challenges I could expect in this career?
- What skills and personality traits are important?
- What do you like the most and least about your career?
- What type of pay can I expect?
- How would I advance?
- How can I best prepare for this career?

To get additional career exposure, consider volunteering or getting an entry-level job in a health care setting.

## **What is a wait list?**

Some of our health programs have wait lists. This happens when there are more students applying for a program than available seats in that program. Wait lists vary in length. Some wait lists could be as short as one semester while others could be as long as several semesters or academic years. If you are qualified and apply for a program that has a wait list, you will receive a letter from the College informing you of your acceptance into that program. The letter will also state the semester and year in which you are scheduled to start the program. A wait list means that qualified students who are accepted to a program do not actually start professional courses until a later date. If you are on the wait list, however, you may begin by taking the general education courses required by the program.

### ***Can I get on a wait list before I finish my admission requirements for that program?***

No. You must successfully complete all admission requirements and be accepted to the program first. Then you can get on a wait list.

### ***If I’m on a wait list, can I take courses towards my program?***

If you’re on a wait list, you can take the general courses that go toward your degree, but not the program-specific courses. For example, if you’re on the wait list for nursing, you can be working on courses in anatomy and physiology, microbiology, psychology, history, sociology, and English. But you cannot take your nursing courses until you are scheduled to begin the nursing program (the semester and year of your wait list, as listed on your acceptance letter).

## ***Will I get moved ahead on a wait list if I have better grades than someone else?***

No. If you are on the wait list, it means that you have successfully completed your admission requirements and have been accepted to a program. Your position on the wait list is determined by the timing of your application. It does not matter if your grades are better than someone else who is also on the wait list.

## ***What determines my rank on the wait list?***

Your rank on the wait list is determined according to the date when you submit a completed application. A completed application means you have successfully completed and submitted the application, all admission requirements, and all required entrance exams (such as, in some cases, the TEAS or HOBET). The Test of Essential Academic Skills (TEAS) and/or Health Occupations Basic Entrance Test (HOBET) predict the academic readiness of applicants prior to admission into a health care program. They are web-based, supervised assessments that include subtests in reading, mathematics, science, and English language. If you skip any of these steps, the process is delayed. For further details, and to complete one of the admission requirements, attend a health information session.

## ***Is there any way I can move ahead on the wait list?***

It's not uncommon for students on a wait list to move ahead on the list by a semester, and sometimes even a year or two. Moving ahead occurs when other students drop off the wait list and space opens sooner. You are chosen based on your wait list rank. If you are next in line, the College will notify you and you must respond quickly to reserve your new admission date.

## ***What must I do to stay on a wait list?***

You **MUST** respond to all inquiries from the College regarding your wish to stay on the wait list! If you do not respond in a timely fashion, you will be dropped off the wait list and have to reapply. This means that you will lose your current space on the list and have to start from the bottom. This could also mean that you need to fulfill any admission requirements that have changed since you previously applied! This is why it's always important to open your mail and respond to the College's requests!

## ***It's OK to consider other health-related programs!***

Should you consider cross-training or getting additional degrees or certifications in different health careers? It depends on your individual goals. Here are some potential benefits of cross-training, additional degrees or certifications:

- Greater knowledge, skills and experience, which may help you advance in another health career
- Quicker entry into a health career (if you enroll in a shorter program, i.e., certificate program) before you begin a lengthier program of study (i.e., degree program)
- The ability to work in one health career while training for another
- Making career contacts that can help you in the future
- Quicker entry into a program of study, if the program you originally wanted has a lengthy wait list

Different health care programs often share some of the same courses. Suppose you begin a health program and find that it isn't right for you. If you've done reasonably well in your coursework, you may be able to apply that coursework toward another health program that's a better match for your skills and interests. For example, let's say you've taken all your math, English, biology, and anatomy/physiology courses in preparation for nursing. But after your first semester of nursing, you decide that you don't really like nursing. Perhaps you discover that radiology would be a better fit with your personality and interests. The good news is that the math, English, biology and anatomy/physiology courses you've taken and successfully completed can be applied toward the radiology program.

## Ask yourself the tough questions!

In summary, you need to ask yourself some tough questions to determine if you're prepared for a health career. Here are some examples:

- What are my strengths and challenges?
- What health careers would be a good fit for me and how do I know?
- How will school fit in with my lifestyle?
- How much and what kind of personal and financial support do I have?
- How do I know if I'm really going to like this career? How much career research have I done?

## QCC Alumni Success Story

Irma Aguilar is a proud 2008 graduate of Quinsigamond Community College's Dental Hygiene program. She now works as a Dental Hygienist. Irma chose this career because she loves science and forming relationships with people. Irma says of her job, "I enjoy the interaction with patients, and teaching them what I know about oral hygiene and making better choices about their health." It is helpful that Irma is bilingual, so she can communicate with patients in both Spanish and English.

A typical day on the job for Irma includes cleaning patients' teeth, assessing their dental health, taking x-rays, coming up with a plan of action for patients to care for their teeth, and prepping patients with local anesthesia for work done by the dentist.

Irma started her career at the Great Brook Valley Health Center, where she trained and became certified as a Dental Assistant. She realized at that time that she wanted to continue her education, so she enrolled at QCC, the only school locally to offer a degree in Dental Hygiene. Irma says of the faculty at QCC, "they taught me everything I needed to know to be a health care practitioner." She applauds the Dental Hygiene faculty for their experience and organization. She advises students enrolled in the Dental Hygiene program to "do whatever the teachers ask, because they are the best."

Irma's future goals include going on for a bachelor's degree in Dental Hygiene or Health, and perhaps providing dental care in a hospital setting.

## Sources Used

- Explorehealthcareers.org: [www.explorehealthcareers.org/en/index.aspx](http://www.explorehealthcareers.org/en/index.aspx)
- U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics: [www.bls.gov/oco/cg/cgs035.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oco/cg/cgs035.htm)
- About Health Careers: [healthcareers.about.com](http://healthcareers.about.com)
- Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development: [www.mass.gov](http://www.mass.gov)