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5 Strong-Demand Health Care Jobs, 2014

It's hard to find a health care job that doesn't hold a promising future.

By Bob Weinstein

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the health care industry will add more jobs — at least 5.7 million — than any other industry through 2020. Even the easy-entry, minimal-requirement positions are potentially career jobs because they're stepping stones to others — if one is prepared to go back to school and master new skills.

The following health care jobs are singled out because they boast extremely high potential, excellent pay and a secure future, according to the BLS:

• **Registered nurses** For at least a decade, RNs have ranked among the top 10 high-demand health care jobs. With an aging population, there's a particularly strong demand for RNs specializing in elder care. Besides in hospitals, RNs are also needed to work in public health, rehabilitation centers, schools, nursing facilities and alternate-care settings. The largest number of new RN jobs will be in physicians' offices, according to the BLS.

Training - Entry-level nursing jobs require a bachelor of science degree in nursing or an associate degree. Nursing students must pass the National Council Licensure Examination and meet state requirements as well. Many RNs go on to get their master's degrees in advanced-practice nursing specialties, such as a nurse practitioner or nurse anesthetist.

• **Dental hygienists** Dentists diagnose and treat a patient's dental problems. Dental hygienists are concerned with preventive care. Along with cleaning teeth and removing stains and plaque, hygienists educate and teach patients how to properly care for their teeth and gums.

Training - Most hygienists have an associate degree in dental hygiene. An increasing number are getting bachelor's and master's degrees as well. Most states require licensure as well.

• **Occupational therapists** Working in hospitals, rehabilitation centers, schools and medical practices, to name a few settings, occupational therapists care for patients of all ages, tots to the elderly, suffering from many different conditions, including mental, physical, emotional and developmental issues. Regardless of the medical condition they work with, their goal is to help patients perform daily living and working tasks so patients can lead independent lives.

Training - Minimally OTs need a master's degree in the field. OTs are also required to pass a national certification test before obtaining their license.

• **Respiratory therapists** RTs care for patients with heart and lung problems. They also treat people who have asthma, chronic bronchitis, emphysema and sleep apnea, to name a few conditions they deal with.

Training - Minimally, OTs need an associate degree, but many have a bachelor's degree as well. They also must be licensed and certified.

• **Physical therapist assistants** PTAs help injured patients move more freely. They're part of a clinical team that makes sure that both clients and the business side of a physical-therapy practice move smoothly. PTAs are responsible for cleaning treatment rooms, recording patient data and teaching exercise techniques. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that employment growth for PTAs should average close to 46 percent thru 2020.

Training - There are many PTA two-year associate degree programs. PTAs must graduate from a program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) to be eligible for the licensure exam required by most states.

Graduates of Ridley-Lowell Business & Technical Institute's Medical Assistant Program Land Multiple Job Offers

Ranked among the top 10 health care positions, the projected growth rate for medical assistants is about 31 percent through 2020.

By Bob Weinstein

Graduates of Ridley-Lowell Business & Technical Institute's medical assistant program have no trouble landing jobs. Many of its graduates even receive multiple job offers when — and often before — they complete their training.

Medical assistants rank among the top 10 health care positions, according to the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, with a projected employment growth of about 31 percent through 2020, which is well beyond the average growth rate for all occupations. The demand for MAs in medical facilities — from hospitals and physicians' offices to urgent care and nursing facilities — far outpaces the supply of qualified candidates, said Lauren Weymouth, RL's vice president for business development.

According to recent BLS statistics, health care job growth, largely triggered by an aging population and the recently implemented Affordable Care Act, has averaged 19,000 new jobs a month.

RL's MA program options

RL offers MA students two program options, a one-year day or a 20-month evening program, both of which include a 168-hour externship. Most important, RL boasts a 72 percent retention rate and a 77 percent placement rate for 2012-13.

Enrollment requirements

Beyond a high school diploma, no formal training is required to become an MA, Weymouth said. However, "the trend today is for MAs to become certified," she said. That is echoed by the American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA), which reports that employers — small clinics to large health care facilities — are requiring MAs to be certified. The Registered Medical Assistant (RMA) certification is awarded by the American Medical Technologists (AMT), and the Certified Medical Assistant (CMA) credential is that of the certifying board of the AAMA.

The Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) requirement of the externship program is designed to ensure that students go beyond the classroom and leave with hands-on experience in addition to their certifications.

Ideal entry-level career path

"MAs play a vital role in the health care system because they're often the first and last faces patients see during a doctor's appointment," Weymouth said.

Working under the supervision of physicians, MAs perform administrative and clinical duties. Administrative responsibilities include scheduling appointments, maintaining medical records, and billing and coding information for insurance purposes. Clinical duties include taking and recording vital signs and medical histories, preparing patients for examination, drawing blood and administering medications.

Like many health care jobs, the MA position is an exciting gateway job for candidates considering going back to school to prepare for a health care specialty. "It's an ideal entry-level career path into the health care field," Weymouth said. "Having mastered administrative and clinical tasks, along with exposure to the stresses and tensions of working in a health care setting, MAs are ready to pursue a variety of career options."

Diverse student body

RL's MA program boasts a diverse student body. "Many are recent high school grads who want a fast-track program that leads to a high-demand health care field," Weymouth said. "Others are downsized workers seeking a career change, and health care professionals, such as certified nursing assistants (CNAs), medical secretaries, medical administrative assistants and medical billers and coders."

Do you have what it takes?

To enroll in RL's MA program, candidates must have a high school diploma or GED and pass a personal interview. "Successful MAs have a passion to learn and enjoy helping and working closely with patients," Weymouth added.

Long and proud tradition

Launched in 1850, Ridley-Lowell Business & Technical Institute is one of the nation's oldest private career schools, having successfully trained thousands of individuals for jobs. "Our students have the opportunity to hone high-demand skills in hands-on classes, in a modern campus setting with experienced instructors,"

Weymouth said. "It's a great environment for the person who wants to fulfill their academic requirements, take certifying exams and receive job placement assistance in a short period of time." RL boasts small classes, personal attention and the externship experience, which give students the confidence they need to succeed, Weymouth said. RL's MA grads find jobs in health care facilities such as Danbury Hospital, Center for Pediatric Medicine, Sharon Hospital and Associated Pulmonologists of Western Connecticut, to name a few.

Weymouth is justifiably proud of RL's long-standing relationship with the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS), which verifies the quality of education delivered, retention and graduation rates and the availability of federal financial aid to help students in need. About 80 percent of RL's students receive grants and financial aid.

RL's career-targeted programs are offered at its five locations — in Danbury and New London, Conn., in Binghamton and Poughkeepsie, N.Y. and recently opened West Warwick, RI.

To learn more about RL's medical assistant program, along with its other high-demand career programs,

visit www.ridley.edu, Danbury Campus.