

How to Become a Home Health Care Nurse

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Home Health Care Basics

Home health care nursing is a growing industry, with a large number of patients and their families opting for home-based health care. Today there are specific academic programs to train nurses in home care. There are also a number of agencies that place home health care nurses in the appropriate environment with ailing individuals and their families. These agencies match criteria such as the nurse's experience and qualifications, the patient's care requirements, budget and the location of the patient and the nurse.

There is a growing need for Home Care Nurses because:

*Medicare, Medicaid and Long Term Care insurance reimbursement and documentation have changed treatment methods

*Aging baby-boomers are now in large numbers

*Changes in technology and medical care in hospitals have brought about a significant change, with shorter inpatient stay and more cases of at-home rehabilitation.

*Increasing medical outpatient procedures, with follow-up home care

*Advances in technology and medical care that have decreased mortality rates but increased morbidity and chronic illness.

The job of a Home Health Care Nurse calls for an array of skills and experience. Specializations include a wide range of treatments including emotional support, educating patients on the road to recovery from illness or injury to women who have experienced childbirth. Special care is also needed for ailing children and the elderly who need palliative care for chronic illnesses.

A practicing nurse must be able to adjust to the unique home setting of each patient. They must have good interpersonal skills to deal with the patient on the one hand and the patient's family or support structure on the other. The nurse should be experienced and confident enough to make quick autonomous decisions, without the support structure that is available at a hospital or nursing home.

Children with disabilities, be they genetic, congenital or caused by an injury, present a separate set of challenges to a nurse. They require additional skills such as patience and understanding of the needs of the family. Progress in the medical field is not only increasing the lifespan of these children, but is also allowing them to live comparatively independent lives away from the hospital. In this area, a positive attitude and positive reinforcement is of prime importance for the development of the child.

Experienced nurses are familiar with medication procedures and have completed graduate level programs. Most agencies require that these nurses have at least one year of clinical experience prior to working in home health care. Advanced practicing nurses can expedite that training by helping new nurses understand the home health care market and teaching.

Employment And Salary

In the United States, according to the Department of Labor, there were 2.4 million nurses in America, and many in the medical fraternity believe there is a gross shortage in nursing staff. The shortage is expected to grow to 10% in 2010. The average salaries for nurses in the US are:

*\$53,450 for hospital nursing

*\$49,000 for home care

*\$48,200 for nursing care facilities

Training And Continuing Education

Home health care nurses require:

*Associate degree in nursing (ADN), takes 2-3 years to complete

*Bachelor of Science degree in nursing (BSN), takes 4 years to complete. This course allows nurses to pursue advancement into administrative positions or research, consulting, and teaching. It is also essential to become a clinical nurse specialist, nurse anesthetist, nurse midwife, and nurse practitioner (U.S. Department of Labor, 2004).

*Master's degree in nursing (MSN), with a minimum of two years post-clinical experience for advanced nursing

*All nurses need to have supervised clinical experience during their training

Nurses can also earn specialized professional certificates online in Geriatric Care or Life Care Planning.

All nurses, whether they are working at a hospital, nursing facility, or in home care, need to have continuing education. With constant advances in medicine and the changing face of health care staying abreast with the latest developments enhances patient care and health procedures. Continuing education is offered by universities, continuing education programs, and internet sites. The American Nurses Association (ANA) or the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) is a popular avenue for continuing education.

The career of a home health care nurse is rewarding. Advances in medicine and decreasing mortality and increasing morbidity bring new challenges and opportunities. It provides an opportunity to make a difference one life at a time. Proper education combined with clinical experience will make the home health care nurse an important cog in the wheel of medical care of tomorrow.

Tony Jacowski is a quality analyst for The MBA Journal. Aveta Solution's Six Sigma Online offers online six sigma training and certification classes for lean six sigma, black belts, green belts, and yellow belts.

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