



## INDUSTRY OVERVIEW: ALLIED HEALTH

### What Is Allied Health?

Allied health professionals are those individuals who are involved in the diagnosis and treatment of health care related issues, excluding doctors, chiropractors, optometrists, podiatrists, dentists, and pharmacists. Most of these professionals have direct patient contact in offices, clinics, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, nursing homes, schools, and businesses. They educate and advise patients on illness prevention, proper nutrition, and therapeutic management of health-related problems. This is a continually growing field with a wide variety of opportunities. They include associative health care personnel, adjunctive health care personnel, rehabilitation personnel, and affiliated personnel. Listed below are a few highlighted allied health professions.

### Career Tracks

Audiologists: are professionals who work with people that exhibit hearing, balance, and related ear problems. They examine individuals of all ages and identify those with the symptoms of hearing loss and other auditory, balance, and related neural problems. Using audiometers, computers, and other testing devices, they measure the loudness at which a person begins to hear sounds, the ability to distinguish between sounds, and the impact of hearing loss or balance problems on an individual's daily life. Audiologists interpret these results and may coordinate them with medical, educational, and psychological information to make a diagnosis and determine a course of treatment. Audiologists must effectively communicate diagnostic test results, interpretation, and proposed treatment in a manner easily understood to patients/clients and their families/care givers.

Diagnostic Medical Sonographers: provide patient services using medical ultrasound (high-frequency sound waves that produce images of internal structures). Working under the supervision of a physician responsible for the use and interpretation of ultrasound procedures, the sonographer helps gather sonographic data to diagnose a variety of conditions and diseases, as well as monitor fetal development. They obtain, review, and integrate pertinent patient history and supporting clinical data to facilitate optimum diagnostic results. They also perform appropriate procedures and record anatomical, pathological, and/or physiological data for interpretation by a physician, record and process sonographic data and other pertinent observations made during the procedure for presentation to the interpreting physician, and provide patient education related to medical ultrasound.

Dietitians/Nutritionists: integrate and apply the principles derived from the sciences of food, nutrition, biochemistry, physiology, food management, and behavior to achieve and maintain the health status of the public they serve. Clinical registered dietitians are a vital part of the medical team in hospitals, nursing homes, health maintenance organizations, and other health care facilities where they provide medical nutrition therapy and the use of specific nutrition services to treat chronic conditions, illnesses, or injuries. Opportunities for advancement are available by choosing a particular area of nutrition practice, such as diabetes, heart disease, or pediatrics, or by expanding into hospital administration. Certain specialists within the field include: community registered dietitians, educator registered dietitians, research registered dietitians, consultant registered dietitians, management registered dietitians, and business registered dietitians.

Genetic Counselors: are academically and clinically prepared to provide genetic counseling services to individuals and families seeking information about the occurrence, or risk of occurrence, of a genetic condition or birth defect. The genetic counseling process involves the collection and interpretation of family, genetic, medical, and psychosocial history information. Analysis of this information, together with an understanding of genetic principles and the knowledge of current technologies, provides clients and their families with information about risk, prognosis, medical management, and diagnostic and prevention options.

Registered Nurses (RN): are directly responsible for carrying out treatment plans that have been ordered by physicians. They combine their technical skills and knowledge of nursing procedures together with an understanding of the expected results. Nurses are people-oriented, focusing on health recovery and maintenance. This field offers a wide range of work settings and specialties. Some specialists include certified nurse anesthetists, who provide anesthesia to patients during surgical procedures, nurse practitioners, who have several years of post-baccalaureate education and are able to diagnose illness, prescribe interventions, and order tests, and nurse midwives, who provide total care for pregnant women, from prenatal visits through to delivery. Nurses work in a wide range of environments including hospitals, nursing homes, and individual residences.

Occupational Therapists (OT): employ the therapeutic use of everyday life activities (occupations) with individuals or groups for the purpose of participation in roles and situations in home, school, workplace, community, and other settings. Occupational therapy services are provided for the purpose of promoting health and wellness to those who have, or are at risk for developing, an illness, injury, disease, disorder, condition, impairment, disability, activity limitation, or participation restriction. Occupational therapy addresses the physical, cognitive, psychosocial, sensory, and other aspects of performance in a variety of contexts to support engagement in everyday life activities that affect health, well-being, and quality of life.

Orthotists and Prosthetists: work directly with the physician and representatives of other allied health professions in the rehabilitation of the physically challenged. The orthotist designs and fits devices, known as orthoses, to provide care to patients who have disabling conditions of the limbs and spine. The prosthetist designs and fits devices, known as prostheses, for patients who have partial or total absence of a limb. The role of the orthotist and prosthetist includes, but may not be limited to, five major domains: clinical assessment, patient management, technical implementation, practice management, and professional responsibility.

Physical Therapists (PT): provide services to many different kinds of patients/clients, including those recovering from accidents or illness, people with disabilities and athletes. Physical therapists help improve patients' strength and mobility, relieve pain, and prevent or limit permanent physical disabilities. They provide the patient and the patient's family with instruction and home programs to ensure that healing continues after direct patient care has ended. Physical therapists also work to keep people well and safe from injury, emphasizing the importance of fitness and conditioning and showing people how to avoid injuries.

Physician Assistants (PA): are academically and clinically prepared to practice medicine with the direction and supervision of a doctor of medicine or osteopathy. The physician-PA team relationship is fundamental to the PA profession and enhances the delivery of high-quality health care. Within the physician-PA relationship, PAs make clinical decisions and provide a broad range of diagnostic, therapeutic, preventive, and health maintenance services. The clinical role of PAs includes primary and specialty care in medical and surgical practice settings. PA practice is centered on patient care and may include educational, research, and administrative activities.

Recreation Therapists: use treatment, education, and recreation services to help people with illnesses, disabilities, and other conditions develop and use their leisure in ways that enhance their health, functional abilities, independence, and quality of life. Therapeutic recreation services include the provision of recreational opportunities (e.g., wheelchair sports, exercise and fitness programs, social activities) that can minimize health care costs by allowing individuals with disabilities mechanisms to prevent declines in their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional health, thereby reducing the need for medical services.

Rehabilitation Counselors: assist people with physical, mental, or emotional disabilities to become or remain self-sufficient, productive citizens. Disabilities may result from birth defects, illness and disease, work-related injuries, automobile accidents, the stresses of war, work, daily life, and the aging process. Rehabilitation counselors help individuals with disabilities deal with societal and personal problems, plan careers, and find and keep satisfying jobs. They also may work with individuals, professional organizations, and advocacy groups to address the environmental and social barriers that create obstacles for people with disabilities.

Speech-language Pathologists: are professionals educated in the study of human communication, its development, and its disorders. Speech-language pathologists work with people who cannot make speech sounds or cannot make them clearly; those with speech rhythm and fluency problems, such as stuttering; people with voice quality problems, such as inappropriate pitch or harsh voice; those with problems understanding and producing language; those who wish to improve their communication skills by modifying an accent; those with cognitive communication impairments, such as attention, memory, and problem-solving disorders; and those with hearing loss who use hearing aids or cochlear implants, in order to develop auditory skills and improve communication. Speech-language pathologists often work with education and other health care professionals,

such as teachers, physicians, social workers, and psychologists, to evaluate and treat clients. They counsel individuals and their families concerning communication disorders and how to cope with the stress and misunderstanding that often accompany them.

## Additional Related Occupations

Dental Hygienist	Mental Health Assistant
Surgeon Assistant/Technologist	Nuclear Medicine Technologist
Anesthesiologist Assistant	Licensed Practical Nurse
Blood Bank Technologist	Ophthalmic Technician/Technologist
Cardiovascular Technology Personnel	Optician
Clinical Lab Technician	Orthoptist
Cytotechnologist	Perfusionist
Dental Assistant	Pulmonary Technician
Dental Lab Technician	Radiation Therapy Technologist
Dietetic Technician	X-ray Technician
EEG Technician	Respiratory Therapist
EKG Technician	Art/Music/Dance/Horticulture Therapist
Emergency Medical Technician	Biomedical Engineer
Food Technologist	Health Educator
Histology Technician	Environmental Health Scientist
Medical Assistant	Epidemiologist
Child Life Specialist	Health Services Manager
Patient Representative	Health Information Manager
Massage Therapist	Orientation and Mobility Specialist
Public Health Officer	Cardiovascular Technologist

## Requirements/Skills

Allied health professionals usually possess an affinity toward and an ability in the sciences (biology, chemistry, or physics), as they use logic and scientific thinking to diagnose and treat health related issues. They can easily process technical information and communicate that information to the general public. In addition, they possess a certain manual dexterity (in using instruments), have strong practical problem-solving abilities in the sciences, and can deal with complex scientific tasks. In addition, they generally have strong interpersonal and communication skills and consider themselves caring, responsible, understanding, insightful, friendly, patient, and tactful. They are able to work collaboratively with other team members in a medical setting, can operate well in emergencies/or in difficult situations, and can think well on their feet.

The educational requirements, certification, and licensure necessary to enter these careers vary, and training and degrees are specialized for each area. For nursing, one can attend a 2-year hospital based program, a 4-year BSN program, or a Masters in Nursing. Specialty requirements are as follows:

- Nurse Practitioner, Nurse Midwifery, and Nurse Anesthetist: Master's in Nursing is required.
- OT and PT: Bachelor's degree, certification, and licensure are required; Master's degrees are preferred; PT Doctorate (DPT) is fast gaining favor.
- Speech Pathology/Audiology: Master's degree is required for certification and licensure.
- Nutrition/Dietician: Bachelor's degree is required and a Master's degree is preferred.
- Genetic Counselors: Master's degree is required.
- PA: can work with a Bachelor's degree but those with Master's degrees are gaining an edge.
- Recreation Therapists: Bachelor's degree is required.
- Diagnostic Medical Sonographers: a formal training program either in a diploma program (hospital training), Associate degree program (community colleges) or Bachelor's degree program is required.
- Orthotists/prosthetists: usually earn a Bachelor's degree in the same major. Those with a Bachelor's degree already can enter through postgraduate certificate programs.
- Rehabilitation Counselors: possess either a Bachelor's degree or Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and secure licenses and certification in the field.

Visit [www.ama-assn.org](http://www.ama-assn.org) to find out the requirements necessary for additional allied health careers.

## **Salary**

Salaries vary by the different allied health professions, as well as level of experience and education. Basic ranges include:

Audiologists/Speech Therapists: \$42,590-\$102,210/\$42,970-\$103,630

Diagnostic Medical Sonographers: \$44,900-\$88,450

Dieticians/Nutritionists: \$33,330-\$75,480

Genetic Counselor: \$40,900-\$150,000

Occupational Therapist: \$48,920-\$102,520

Rehabilitation Counselor: \$20,770-\$56,720

Physicians Assistant: \$57,450-\$117,720

Physical Therapist: \$53,620-\$107,920

RN: \$44,190-\$95,130

Orthotists/prosthetists: \$658,060-\$106,800

Recreation Therapists: \$24,640-\$62,670

All salaries above reflect entry level to upper ranges, and were taken from the Occupational Outlook Handbook, March 2012

## **Directories**

Health-Care Careers for the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Health Professions Career and Education Directory

[www.DiscoverNursing.com](http://www.DiscoverNursing.com)

<http://nursewithoutborders.org/>

[www.ama-assn.org](http://www.ama-assn.org)

[www.nursing.org](http://www.nursing.org)

## **Associations**

American Academy of Orthotists and Prosthetists  
American Academy of Nurse Practitioners  
American Academy of Physician Assistants  
American Association of Nurse Anesthetists  
American Dietetic Association  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Orthotic & Prosthetic Association  
American Physical Therapy Association  
American Rehabilitation Counseling Association  
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association  
(ASHA)  
American Therapeutic Recreation Association

National Commission on Orthotic and Prosthetic  
Education  
National League of Nursing  
National Rehabilitation Counseling Association  
National Society of Genetic Counselors  
National Therapeutic Recreation Society  
Physician Assistant Education Association  
Society of Diagnostic Medical Sonography  
Society for Vascular Ultrasound  
The American College of Nurse-Midwives

## **Publications**

See association websites for specific career related magazines, journals, and publications.

## **Websites**

[www.allhealthjobs.com](http://www.allhealthjobs.com)  
[www.explorehealthcareers.org](http://www.explorehealthcareers.org)  
[www.healthcareers.com](http://www.healthcareers.com)  
[www.healthcarerecruitment.com](http://www.healthcarerecruitment.com)  
[www.healthcareerweb.com](http://www.healthcareerweb.com)  
[www.hospitaljobsonline.com](http://www.hospitaljobsonline.com)  
[www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org)  
[www.medzilla.com](http://www.medzilla.com)  
[www.indeed.com](http://www.indeed.com)  
[www.hotjobs.com](http://www.hotjobs.com)  
[www.ama-assn.org](http://www.ama-assn.org)  
[www.whatispublichealth.org](http://www.whatispublichealth.org)

Many associations have websites and links to job boards, openings, and notices. Also log onto websites of specific hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and clinics for opportunities.