



IMAGINE A WORLD WITHOUT REGISTERED NURSES...

WHO REGISTERED NURSES ARE

The 2.9 million registered nurses (RNs) in the U.S. are the nation’s largest healthcare workforce. Nearly every healthcare encounter includes an RN. From the staff nurse in your community hospital, the Advanced Practice Registered Nurse working in a local retail clinic, or the school nurse in your child’s school, the nursing profession is meeting America’s many healthcare needs.

WHAT REGISTERED NURSES DO

Nursing is much more than such obvious work as these and other procedures:

- Physical exams
- Health histories, promotion, counseling and education
- Medication administration, wound care, and numerous other personalized interventions

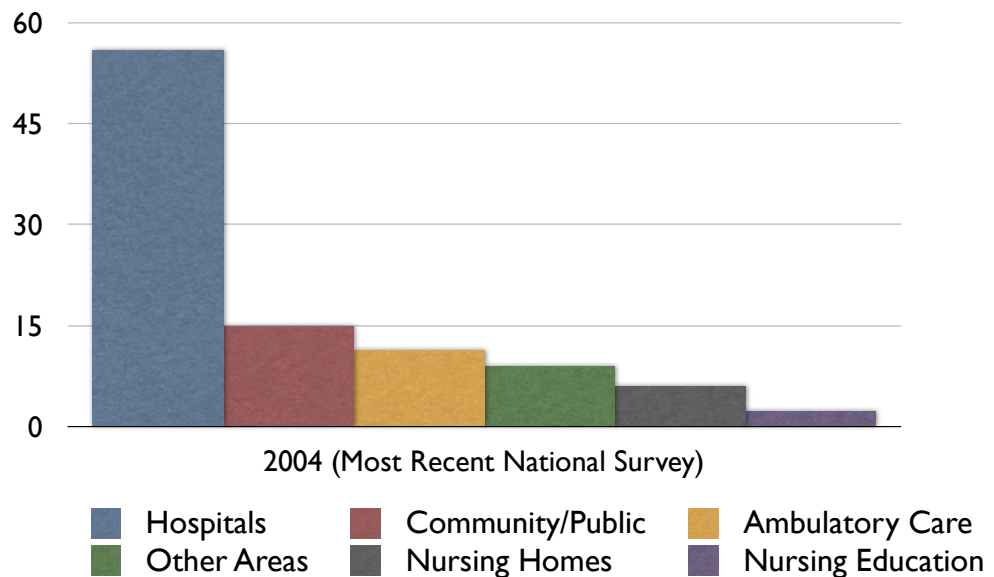
Less well-known and less visible services include:

- Coordination of care, working with other healthcare professionals
- Analysis of patient information and make critical decisions about needed actions.
- Direction and supervision of care delivered by other healthcare personnel such as licensed practical nurses and nurse aides

“RNs are the last link in the safety net in the prevention of errors.”

WHERE REGISTERED NURSES WORK

RNs practice in all healthcare settings throughout the nation such as hospitals, nursing homes, office-based practices, ambulatory healthcare centers, schools, and community health centers. They also provide health care in more surprising locations such as children’s camps, homeless shelters, prisons, sporting events and tourist destinations.



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In 2004, 2.4 of the 2.9 million RNs with an active U.S. license were employed in nursing. 56% of these RNs worked in hospitals; 15% worked in community and public health centers; 11.5% worked in ambulatory care (physician offices, APRN offices, dialysis centers, HMOs, etc.); 6% worked in nursing homes; 2.4% were employed as educators in schools of nursing, and; the remaining nurses worked in other areas such as schools, prisons, and medical equipment providers. The median annual earnings of registered nurses were \$60,000 in May 2007.

WHO ARE ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSES?

Advanced practice registered nurse (APRN) is an umbrella term for any RN who has met advanced educational and licensure requirements, and who has attained certified expertise in clinical management of specific conditions or health problems. Decades of research has shown that APRNs are able to provide care that is as high in quality as that provided by physicians.

Most APRNs are further identified by four categories of practice:

- Nurse practitioners (NP)
- Clinical nurse specialists (CNS)
- Certified nurse midwives (CNM)
- Certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNA)

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These healthcare practitioners are qualified to furnish many of the same services traditionally provided by physicians, including diagnosing illnesses, performing physical exams, ordering and interpreting laboratory tests, and determining treatment plans. As well, APRNs are authorized to practice across the U.S. and have prescriptive authority in all fifty states and the District of Columbia.

Most states require APRNs to be recognized either by a state agency or certified by a national organization such as the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) or the relevant specialty nurses association. Medicare, the Veterans Administration, and private insurers can reimburse directly many APRNs for the care they provide.

In 2004, there were 240,460 APRNs in the United States. These nurses play a critical role in providing needed primary healthcare services. Each year many Americans go without the healthcare services that they need because physicians simply are not available to care for them or no longer accept their insurance coverage (such as Medicare). This deficit plagues both rural and urban areas. APRNs are an exception to this trend; they often treat patients in provider-shortage areas.

WHO ARE LPNS?

All nurses are not the same. Licensed practical nurses (LPNs), sometimes known as licensed vocational nurses (LVNs) are familiar to the public. LPN education and the patient care services they can provide, however, are simply more limited than those of registered nurses.

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HOW NURSES QUALIFY: LICENSURE

Every state and the District of Columbia have a board of nursing with a mission of protecting the public from harm. Governance of the practice of nursing within that jurisdiction includes:

- Establishing requirements for initial licensure and retaining: basic education, continuing education and/or competency
- Interpretation of scope of practice as defined in state statute (nurse practice act)
- Investigation into complaints of licensees and disciplinary actions

HOW NURSES QUALIFY: EDUCATION

These educational pathways lead to eligibility to take the standardized National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX)-RN.

Undergraduate Education

The **Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BS/BSN)** is offered at colleges and universities:

- Prepares graduates to engage in the full scope of professional nursing practice across all healthcare settings
- Is intended to result in a deeper understanding of the cultural, political, economic, and social issues that affect patients and influence healthcare delivery
- Includes nursing theory, physical and behavioral sciences, and humanities with additional content in research, leadership, and may include such topics as healthcare economics, health informatics, and health policy

Between 2000 and 2004, 40% of RNs received their initial education in baccalaureate or higher degree programs.

The **Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN)** is offered by community colleges and hospital-based schools of nursing. Diplomas are offered by hospital-based schools of nursing. Although once the most common educational route for RNs, diploma programs are becoming increasingly scarce as nursing education has shifted to academic institutions.

Both BS/BN and ADN programs:

- Include nursing theory, physical and behavioral sciences, and studies in the humanities
- Prepare nurses for a wide range of roles that require nursing theory and technical proficiency

Some differences between these two pathways, however, are reflected in these trends:

- In 2007, 60% of RNs received their initial education in associate degree programs
- Between 2000 and 2004, 3% of RNs received their initial education in diploma programs
- Many RNs who first receive an ADN degree return to school in their working life to continue their education

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Graduate Education — These graduate programs offer additional routes to advancing the expertise of registered nurses:

- **Master’s Degree (MSN)** programs offer a number of tracks designed to prepare Advanced Practice Nurses, nurse administrators, and nurse educators.
- **Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)** programs are research-focused whose graduates typically teach and/or conduct research.
- **Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP)** programs focus on clinical practice or leadership roles.

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