

1: Registered Nurse (RN)

by 3andB Staff Writer | July 9, 2025

Unit 1: Nursing Careers

The Professional Path of a Registered Nurse: What Registered Nurses Actually Do

Registered Nurses (RNs) serve as the backbone of healthcare systems worldwide. They are licensed healthcare professionals who provide and coordinate patient care in various settings. RNs assess patients' conditions, administer medications and treatments, collaborate with healthcare teams, and educate patients about managing their health. Unlike what you might see on TV shows, nursing involves critical thinking, technical skills, and quick decision-making—not just taking temperatures and giving medications.



"Hands that heal, hearts that care: beyond the stereotypes, nurses embody compassion, skill, and critical thinking in every touch."

The role of an RN extends far beyond bedside care. You might find RNs developing care plans, operating sophisticated medical equipment, advocating for patients, supervising nursing assistants, and documenting crucial information in medical records. RNs work in diverse environments including hospitals, clinics, schools, nursing homes, public health departments, and even patients' homes.

Career Paths and Specializations

The nursing field offers numerous specialization opportunities based on your interests and strengths:

- **Critical Care Nursing:** Working with critically ill patients in intensive care units (ICUs)
- **Pediatric Nursing:** Caring specifically for children and adolescents
- **Emergency Nursing:** Providing rapid assessment and care in emergency departments
- **Oncology Nursing:** Supporting cancer patients through treatment
- **Mental Health Nursing:** Addressing psychological and psychiatric needs
- **Public Health Nursing:** Focusing on community health and prevention
- **Nurse Education:** Teaching the next generation of nurses
- **Nurse Management:** Overseeing nursing teams and operations

These specializations require additional training after becoming an RN, often through certification programs or advanced

degrees. Each path offers different work environments, challenges, and rewards.

Education and Licensing Requirements

To become an RN, you must complete an accredited nursing program and pass the NCLEX-RN licensing exam. There are three educational pathways: a 2-3 year Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN), a 4-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), or a diploma from an approved nursing program (though these are becoming less common).

Many employers now prefer or require BSN degrees, and research shows that higher

education levels among nurses correlate with better patient outcomes. After completing your education, you must pass the NCLEX-RN exam to obtain a nursing license. Each state has specific licensing requirements, but all require passing this standardized exam.

The education doesn't stop after becoming licensed. RNs must complete continuing education to maintain their license, stay current with medical advances, and develop professionally. Many RNs also pursue advanced degrees to become nurse practitioners, nurse anesthetists, or nurse educators.

The Reality of Nursing: Challenges and Rewards

Nursing is physically and emotionally demanding. You'll likely work long shifts—often 12 hours—including nights, weekends, and holidays. The job involves constant standing, walking, and lifting. Nurses face exposure to infectious diseases, potential workplace injuries, and high-stress situations.

However, nursing also offers unique rewards. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median annual wage for RNs was about \$77,600 as of 2022, with experienced nurses in specialized roles earning significantly more. The job outlook remains excellent, with projected growth of 6% from 2022 to 2032, creating about 193,100 new positions annually.

Beyond financial stability, nursing provides profound personal satisfaction. You directly impact lives during their most vulnerable moments. You'll experience the joy of seeing patients recover, the privilege of supporting families through difficult times, and the satisfaction of making a tangible difference in your community.

Nursing combines science with compassion, technical skills with interpersonal abilities, and routine procedures with unique human experiences. For those suited to its demands, it offers a meaningful career with opportunities for growth, specialization, and advancement while making a genuine difference in people's lives.

Nurses form the essential connection between healthcare systems and the patients they serve, translating complex medical information into practical care while providing comfort and support throughout the healing process.

Technology is rapidly changing nursing practice. Today's RNs use electronic health records, telehealth platforms, smart infusion pumps, and wearable monitoring devices. The ability to adapt to new technologies while maintaining the human element of care is becoming increasingly important in this field. Modern nursing combines traditional caregiving with technological expertise, creating opportunities for tech-savvy individuals who also have strong interpersonal skills.

Did You Know?

- Nurses walk an average of 4-5 miles during a typical 12-hour shift, equivalent to about 10,000 steps.
- Male nurses make up only about 12% of the RN workforce in the United States, though this number has been steadily increasing over the past decade.
- Florence Nightingale, considered the founder of modern nursing, established the first professional nursing school in London in 1860, using data analysis and statistics to improve healthcare outcomes.

1: Registered Nurse (RN)

GUIDED NOTES

Key Terms

Define the following terms based on the article:

1. Registered Nurse (RN): _____
2. NCLEX-RN: _____
3. Specialization: _____
4. BSN: _____
5. ADN: _____

Main Concept Overview

Complete the following sentences using the word bank provided:

Word Bank: technology, advocate, specializations, critical thinking, NCLEX-RN

1. Nursing involves _____, technical skills, and quick decision-making beyond just taking temperatures and giving medications.
2. To become an RN, you must complete an accredited nursing program and pass the _____ licensing exam.
3. RNs serve as an _____ for patients within the healthcare system.
4. The nursing field offers numerous _____ based on your interests and strengths, such as pediatric nursing, emergency nursing, and oncology nursing.
5. Modern nursing increasingly requires adaptation to new _____ while maintaining the human element of care.

Matching Section

Match each term with its correct description:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| _____ 1. Critical Care Nursing | A. Caring specifically for children and adolescents |
| _____ 2. Pediatric Nursing | B. Teaching the next generation of nurses |
| _____ 3. Public Health Nursing | C. Working with critically ill patients in ICUs |
| _____ 4. Nurse Education | D. Addressing psychological and psychiatric needs |
| _____ 5. Mental Health Nursing | E. Focusing on community health and prevention |

True/False Questions

Mark each statement as True (T) or False (F):

- _____ 1. Most employers now prefer nurses with Associate Degrees rather than Bachelor's Degrees.
- _____ 2. Registered Nurses must complete continuing education to maintain their license.
- _____ 3. The nursing field is projected to grow by about 6% from 2022 to 2032.
- _____ 4. Male nurses make up approximately 50% of the RN workforce in the United States.
- _____ 5. Nurses typically work fixed 8-hour shifts during standard business hours.

Fill in the Table

Complete the table with information about nursing education and career aspects:

Nursing Career Information	Your Answer
Duration of Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) program	
Duration of Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program	
Name of required licensing exam for all RNs	
Median annual wage for RNs as of 2022	
Projected job growth percentage for nursing (2022-2032)	

Critical Thinking Questions

1. How might the increasing use of technology in healthcare change the role of Registered Nurses in the next decade? What skills would be most important for future nurses to develop?

2. Consider the physical and emotional demands of nursing described in the article. What self-care strategies might be important for nurses to develop to maintain their wellbeing throughout their career?

1: Registered Nurse (RN) - Hypotheticals

Scenario 1: High-Pressure Situations

You're shadowing an ER nurse when multiple trauma patients arrive after a car accident. The nurse remains calm while prioritizing patients, making quick decisions, and stabilizing critical patients before additional help arrives.

- a) How would you respond emotionally to high-pressure medical situations?
- b) Would you find the adrenaline of emergency nursing exciting or overwhelming?
- c) What personal strengths might help you handle high-stress scenarios?

Scenario 2: Long-Term Patient Relationships

As an oncology nurse, you work with the same patients throughout months of treatments. You've built a relationship with a patient who just completed their final successful chemotherapy session.

- a) How would you feel about forming emotional connections with patients you see regularly?
- b) Would you prefer ongoing relationships or brief interactions with many different patients?
- c) How might you maintain professional boundaries while providing compassionate care?

Scenario 3: Night Shift Lifestyle

You're offered a position requiring overnight shifts (7pm-7am) for at least two years before having seniority to request day shifts. This means sleeping during daylight and adjusting your social life around an unconventional schedule.

- a) How might your body adapt to working nights and sleeping during daylight?
- b) What personal challenges might arise with this schedule?
- c) Would higher night shift pay make this worthwhile for you?

Scenario 4: AI and Patient Care

Your hospital implemented an AI system that analyzes patient data and suggests care plans. Newer nurses rely heavily on the AI recommendations, while experienced nurses use the AI as just one tool while maintaining their clinical judgment and bedside presence.

- a) How comfortable would you be working with AI-assisted healthcare technology?
- b) Would you trust your own observations or AI recommendations if they occasionally differed?
- c) Could you balance using advanced technology while maintaining meaningful human connections with patients?

1: Registered Nurse (RN) - Reflection Questions

#1

How might your personal strengths and challenges align with the demands of a nursing career?

Consider your ability to handle stress, communicate with others, and make decisions under pressure. Think about times when you've helped someone through a difficult situation. What aspects of that experience were rewarding or challenging for you?

#2

What nursing specialization seems most aligned with your interests and why?

Reflect on your preferred working environment, the types of patients you'd find most rewarding to work with, and your personal interests in healthcare. Consider how your choice might affect your work-life balance and long-term career satisfaction.

#3

How would you manage the emotional aspects of nursing, such as witnessing suffering or forming connections with patients who don't recover?

Reflect on how you typically process difficult emotions. Consider what support systems you might need and what boundaries you would establish to maintain your emotional wellbeing while still providing compassionate care.

TERM	DEFINITION
Advocate	
Collaborate	
Compassion	
Critical thinking	
Documentation	
Licensing	
NCLEX-RN	
Nursing	
Specialization	
Telehealth	

1: WORD SEARCH

Registered Nursing

V V Q E X J A D V O C A T E C P D R U C X V D S
E A Z M X E P V E K F I T M X L B H I V L E R F
Z H G E U M C R W Z P R O X O O F N L F V V K Y
D L I S A G V C O M P A S S I O N U T M W S A Y
R O S P E C I A L I Z A T I O N R R D O O M G Y
W U C G O T Q L V M H U I J V Q N S C R A F J X
Y W S U U K N V L U S G L E Z L M I M U K H T B
H L M O M G L I H P L J F X E Z F N H O W H T P
F I T S E E S H L B P S D D A L H G M W U D Y K
X C U N E Y N B S U Z J T X P D D C T D X W F W
N E L L G V L T G N R M R T N H R A O C I D G M
H N X K I W Z T A Y E M O S T X Z U P F B B L J
E S V S B D I R P T A D D J E K B N U Y E M X H
H I C H F P I A E Z I W J R L F Q C J B E J D M
W N V H L Z S T D A G O E Y E G J L D G G N Q X
B G X W P C A Z E P B H N I H R Q E O T R F A Q
K T I B A P I U O P E C P Z E S N X S I G M L C
M S V R F P C W D J K L Y U A J K R K C G Y S U
G F H B G X A C Q R M W F I L D X N G E G N Q C
A D C X S J W D M Y W X K Y T M S I I N D V G J
Z C F J F H A U K O T V M F H J D Q W K R C T P
V J D F X R B U A J E Q C O L L A B O R A T E L
K L N W H K F A C R I T I C A L T H I N K I N G
C G P Y G J Z O L O J F N K V K A G P J D I R A

Telehealth

Specialization

Nursing

NCLEX RN

Licensing

Documentation

Critical Thinking

Compassion

Collaborate

Advocate

Registered Nursing

Across

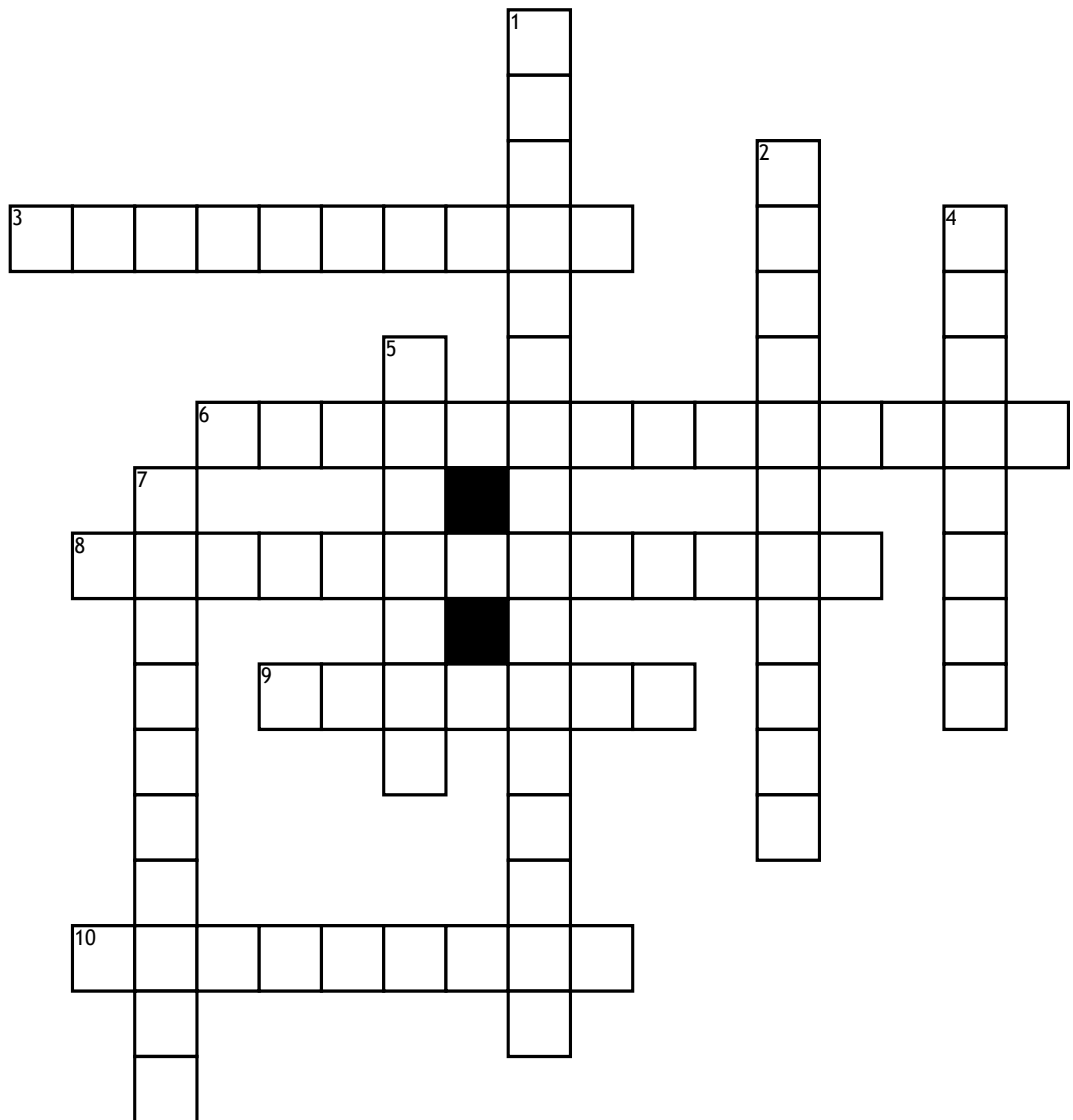
3. The provision of healthcare remotely by means of telecommunications technology.

6. Concentration on and becoming an expert in a particular skill or area of study, such as pediatrics or emergency care.

8. The process of recording patient information and care details in medical records.

9. The profession focused on providing care for individuals, families, and communities to help them attain, maintain, or recover optimal health and quality of life.

10. The granting of permission by a competent authority to engage in a business or occupation or in an activity otherwise unlawful.



Down

1. The objective analysis and evaluation of an issue in order to form a judgment. (Two words)

2. To work jointly with others or together in an intellectual endeavor to produce or create something.

4. A person who publicly supports or recommends a particular cause; in nursing, someone who speaks up for patients' needs and rights.

5. National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses; the standardized test that nursing graduates must pass to obtain a nursing license. ____-____

7. Deep awareness of the suffering of another accompanied by the wish to relieve it.