

Medical Jobs Without the MD

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You don't have to be a doctor to break into the often lucrative and growing health-care field.

With the average medical student taking on \$140,000 in educational debt, according to the American Medical Association, an increasing number of would-be doctors are turning to alternative health care careers instead. Here are five in-demand [health care jobs](#) that don't require an MD.

Radiological Technologist

Those with an eye for detail (and an aversion to debt) needn't look farther than their latest X-ray. Dedicated to prepping patients for and administering diagnostic imaging exams like X-rays, fluoroscopies, MRIs and mammograms, radiological technologists pinpoint medical problems before they become overwhelming.

"The majority of radiologic technologists work in community hospitals or freestanding clinics, but some work in government hospitals, university medical centers, and teaching facilities," says Myke Kudlas, vice-president of education and research for the American Society of Radiologic Technologists. "The average salary is \$58,673."

Kudlas adds that interested parties can break into the field by earning an accredited [certificate](#), [associate](#) or [bachelor's degree](#) program. In addition, radiologic technologists must pass a national certification exam.

Physical Therapist Assistant

The only problem many physical therapist assistants face is sorting through the job offers. Deemed one of the top 20 fastest-growing occupations by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, physical therapist assistants find work aiding licensed PTs in hospitals, clinics, rehabilitation facilities, nursing homes, schools, and at-home care organizations.

"[PTAs] are required to complete a [two-year associate degree](#) from any of the 237 accredited programs in the country and pass the licensure exam in their state," says Jody Gandy, director of academic clinical education affairs for the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA). "After that, the median starting salary is between \$36,000 and \$40,000 for a new graduate."

Gandy adds that the job also comes with sweet benefits. While almost all full-time PTAs are given health, dental, and retirement benefits, many also receive continuing education support or employer-sponsored membership to APTA.

Pharmacy Technician

Completing an [associate degree](#) program and passing a national certification exam is all that's required to get started as a pharmacy technician. Commanding pay ranging from \$30,600 (average entry-level salary) to \$47,800 (average supervisor-level salary) as well as full benefits, pharmacy technicians help pharmacists prepare prescriptions, file insurance claims, and answer

medical questions. Landing a spot on the top 20 fastest-growing occupations list, the BLS reports that the pharmacy technician industry is expected to grow 32 percent between now and 2016.

Personal Home Care Aide

Those looking for a flexible, people-centric job will have their work cut out for them. With personal home care aides expected to more than double between now and 2016, caregivers willing to do anything from cooking and mowing lawns to providing psychological support for home-bound patients won't have a lengthy job hunt. While the National Association for Home Care and Hospice offers [certification](#) for home care aides, many break into the field with no formal training.

Pay varies as much as job responsibilities. According to Salary.com, full-time aides earn anywhere from \$17,500 per year for entry-level work to \$70,000+ for those in supervisor roles.

Dental Hygienist

"Even in this economy, our field is growing 30 percent each year," says Lynn Ramer, president of the American Dental Hygienists' Association. "The public is very aware of the link between what's going on in your mouth and how it affects the rest of your body, so dental hygienists will always be in-demand."

Requiring only an associate's degree, a passing grade on the National Board Dental Hygiene Examination, and completion of required regional or state licensure exams to break in, dental hygienists enjoy a full benefits package, 401(k) options, flexible hours and salaries that range from \$50,000 to \$90,000 a year. In addition to working in private practices and clinics, hygienists also find work in hospitals, school systems, and eldercare facilities.

"Hygienists may also decide to go into pharmaceutical sales," Ramer says. "There are quite a few places prevention specialists can work."

In fact, that's true for all five of these positions. On top of being able to work directly in the field, those with training in radiological technology, physical therapist assistance, pharmacy technology, home care, or dental hygiene can also find jobs in medical sales, health care administration, or education.

"Students really do have a lot of options," says Jody Gandy. "The marketplace [for these employees] is quite competitive."