

Top 5 Health-Care Careers Without Medical School

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Are you interested in health care but don't have the time, means, or background required to become a doctor? If so, you've got something in common with the majority of people working in health care today. In 2008, approximately 11 million Americans worked in the health care industry, and less than a million of those employees held an MD degree.

Health care is one of today's largest industries, and career opportunities exist for all education levels. In fact, many of the industry's fastest-growing fields require only an associate's degree or bachelor's degree to enter. With the abundance of online degree programs and career training options, a transition into health care may be easier than you think. The following five career paths are accessible and growing fast.

1. Physical Therapist Assistant

Physical therapist assistants provide treatment for patients under the direction of a physical therapist. Patients include accident victims or people suffering from a debilitating condition. Assistants administer treatments such as exercise, massage, traction, and ultrasound to improve patients' mobility. Physical therapist assistants earned an average of \$46,300 in 2008, and employment is expected to grow by 29 percent from 2006 to 2016.

Many states require physical therapist assistants to have an **associate's degree in physical therapy**. An associate's degree generally takes two years to complete and requires both hands-on experience and coursework in anatomy, biology, chemistry, and psychology.

2. Medical Assistant

Medical assistants perform the administrative tasks necessary to keep a physician's office or clinic running smoothly. From maintaining patient records to preparing examination rooms, the responsibilities of **medical assistants** vary depending on the office. Employment of medical assistants is expected to grow by 35 percent from 2006 to 2016, making it one of the country's fastest-growing fields. In 2008, medical assistants earned an average of \$29,060.

Career training for medical assistants generally involves a one-year certificate program or two-year **associate's degree program**. While not strictly required, a degree demonstrates your understanding of basic clinical procedures, laboratory techniques, and pharmaceutical principles, as well as record keeping and insurance processing.

3. Dental Hygienist

Dental hygienists help patients maintain healthy mouths by performing cleanings, taking X-rays, and teaching good oral hygiene. More than half of dental hygienists work less than 35 hours per week, and in 2008 they earned an average of \$66,950. Employment of hygienists is expected to grow by 30 percent through 2016, which means plenty of chances to enter the field.

Dental hygienists must train at an accredited dental hygiene school and pass state licensing exams. A certificate or associate's **degree in dental hygiene** is the minimum requirement for

work in most dental offices, though some students choose to pursue a bachelor's degree in dental hygiene in order to teach or perform research.

4. Registered Nurse

Registered [nurses](#) provide support for doctors by running diagnostic tests, administering treatments, and caring for patients on a day-to-day basis. Patients rely on nurses for treatment, information, and emotional support, so nurses must have a passion for helping others. In 2008, registered nurses earned an average of \$65,130, and the field is expected to grow by 23 percent from 2006 to 2016.

Most nurses enter the field by earning either an [associate's degree in nursing](#) or a [bachelor's of science in nursing](#). A bachelor's degree takes about four years to complete versus a two-year associate's degree program, but this extra level of education often gives applicants a leg up in the hiring process. With today's plethora of online degree programs, you can prepare for a new career without leaving your day job.

5. Pharmacy Technician

Pharmacy technicians work with licensed pharmacists to provide prescription drugs and health care products to patients. Their duties include counting tablets, preparing labels, answering phones, and interacting with customers. Pharmacy technicians earned an average of \$28,500 in 2008, and the number of jobs is expected to grow by 35 percent from 2006 to 2016.

While formal training is not required to become a pharmacy technician, employers prefer hiring applicants that hold a certificate or degree from a [formal training program](#). Pharmacy technician associate's degree programs include courses in pharmaceutical terminology, calculations, record keeping, and ethics. These programs take one to two years, and many online education programs give you the flexibility to work around your busy schedule.

Who Needs a Medical Doctor Degree?

While you probably want your surgeon to be a medical school graduate, the majority of health care positions don't require advanced training. These career paths are in demand, growing fast, and most importantly, offer a rewarding way to make a difference in patients' lives.