

Nursing – Levels of Education and Degrees

There are various levels of nursing degrees a person can choose to pursue in order to enter the nursing field. The level of responsibility given to them, as well as their salary when entering the work field, will depend heavily on how much education and training a person has received. Obviously the higher the degree a person has acquired, the wider range of choices they will have in securing the job of their choice, and they will also generate a higher income. (Note: Job Outlook is based on national data.)

CNA

Certified nursing assistants (CNAs) also known as nurse aides, care partners, and patient care technicians, perform hands-on care with routine tasks - e.g. eating, dressing, etc. CNAs often work in convalescent hospitals. CNA programs generally are about 8-10 weeks in length. Average salary: \$25,620. Job Outlook: Excellent

LPN or LVN Programs (Licensed Practical Nurse or Licensed Vocational Nurse)

Perform basic nursing tasks under supervision from registered nurses and physicians. Must complete state-approved accredited training and pass the National Council Licensure Examination, or NCLEX, at the practical nurse level. Although some high schools and hospitals offer LPN or LVN programs, most practical nurses learn in technical schools and community colleges. The training usually takes approximately 12-18 months, including classes and clinical work, and culminates in a diploma or certificate. Typical classes include nursing fundamentals, pharmacology, anatomy, nutrition and psychology. Average salary: \$31,440. Job Outlook: Excellent.

RN Programs (Registered Nurse)

RNs take care of patients, coordinate their care and supervise LPNs/LVNs. RN programs come at three levels: certificate programs, associate degree programs and bachelor's degree in nursing, or BSN programs. Associate degree and diploma programs usually require between two and three years, while a bachelor's degree usually takes four years. Typical RN classes include physiology, anatomy, chemistry, psychology and nursing, plus liberal arts and social sciences. RN students also complete clinical rotations in areas such as maternity, surgery and pediatrics. After finishing accredited education, nurses must pass the NCLEX exam at the RN level for state licensing. Average salary: \$64,690. Job Outlook: Excellent.

BSN Advantages

Compared to diploma or associate degree programs, BSN programs require more classes in social sciences, physical science, critical thinking and leadership and more clinical rotations outside of hospitals. Although RN suffices for entry-level work, supervisory, teaching and research jobs usually require a BS degree. Because of their superior preparation in community nursing, leadership and disease prevention, nurses with a BSN qualify for more jobs, according to the HealthGuidance website. In fact, some employers hire only RNs who have bachelor's degrees, so a BSN may eventually become the standard.

Graduate Nursing Programs

Registered nurses with a bachelor's degree can complete a master's degree to qualify as advanced-practice registered nurses, or APRNs. For example, one type of APRN is a family nurse practitioner, or FNP. Depending on state laws, APRNs provide primary care and prescribe drugs. Specialty training is also available in more than 50 areas, each with its own requirements, including cardiac care, emergency, geriatric care and hematology, according to ExploreHealthCareers.org. Because of the high course load, some APRN programs offer a Doctor of Nursing Practice, or DNP, instead of a master's degree. Average salary for a Clinical Nurse Specialist: \$50,800-\$100,000. Job Outlook: Excellent. Average salary for Nurse Practitioners is \$90,583. Job Outlook: Excellent.