Career Paths for Nursing

What does it take?
To become a nurse, you must complete a state-approved nursing program and pass a licensing exam called the NCLEX. All nursing programs require a high school diploma or its equivalent. Schools’ entrance requirements vary and may include a standardized test such as the ACT. Recommended high school courses include science, math, English and social studies.

Where do I start?
There is not a typical career path. You can start directly in a registered nurse (R.N.) program, or you may want to start in a licensed practical nurse (LPN) or a certified nurse assistant (CNA) program. LPN and CNA programs require less initial education so you can start working sooner. Many nurses who do this continue their education and earn while they learn. Knowing the education and license needed for the work you want to do will help you decide what type of school to attend.

Questions to ask
• What are my goals?
• Will I need to work part-time or full-time while attending school?
• Do I want online course options?
• What skills would I like to attain?
• What are my strengths/interests?

Nursing offers you the opportunity to create a career path filled with many personal and professional rewards. By planning the path you want to take, you will understand the requirements and choices along the way. Consider the many options in nursing and find a good fit for you.

Certified Nurse Assistant
Most employers require CNAs to complete mandatory training courses with a passing competency evaluation. Most programs take less than 100 hours and cover skills for daily hygiene, bedside care, vital-sign measurement, common health problems and chronic illnesses. In the Kansas City area, employment for CNAs is abundant in long-term care facilities. Hospitals also employ basic patient care aides who are willing to learn advanced skills.

Licensed Practical Nurse
Most practical nursing programs take less than one year and include both classroom and clinicals, which is the term used for supervised patient care. Coursework includes anatomy, physiology, nutrition, first aid, administration of drugs, obstetrics and pediatrics. LPNs typically provide the greatest amount of direct patient care. LPNs are in great demand in long-term care facilities, home care and clinics. In hospitals, the trend is to use more R.N.s and fewer LPNs. The demand for LPNs in the Kansas City area is projected to increase by more than 7 percent during this decade.

Registered Nurse
There are two basic nursing education programs to become an R.N. Associate degree in nursing (ADN) programs are two-year programs that include general studies and nursing education. A bachelor’s degree in nursing (BSN) is a four-year program that also includes general studies and nursing education while focusing on leadership development. Coursework includes anatomy, physiology, nutrition, pharmacology, clinical skills, obstetrics, pediatrics, community nursing and leadership skills.

BSN completion programs are designed for nurses who want to continue beyond their ADN degree. Accelerated baccalaureate programs are designed for individuals seeking a BSN who already have a bachelor’s degree in another field. These programs take one to two years. The demand for R.N.s in Kansas City is projected to increase by more than 19 percent during this decade.

Graduate Education
A master’s degree can prepare you for work as an advanced practice nurse (APN) in a specific area — clinical nurse specialist, nurse practitioner, certified nurse midwife or certified registered nurse anesthetist. Other master of science in nursing (MSN) degree programs can prepare you to work as an educator in a hospital or nursing school; work as a nurse leader, administrator or executive; or work in public health nursing or in health care informatics. Many additional post-master’s certificates and doctoral programs prepare nurses for other exciting roles and settings.

Visit www.kchealthcareers.com for more information about Kansas City nursing schools, employers and local scholarships, as well as links to local and national organizations and resources about the nursing profession.
Top 10 Reasons to Be a Nurse
1. making a difference
2. being part of a skilled team
3. always being challenged
4. learning every day
5. touching someone’s life
6. knowing my views matter within my workplace and my profession
7. having a stable career outlook
8. achieving personal growth and rewards
9. working in a highly respected profession
10. the chance to use all of myself

Where will I work?
Hospitals, doctors’ clinics, community/public service, outpatient facilities, nursing homes, rehabilitation facilities, long-term care, home health, schools and colleges, research, insurance, and legal settings are some of the options available.

Nurses have lots of flexibility in their working hours. A hospital shift can be 8 to 12 hours. Some work 36 hours in 3 days or 40 hours in 4 days and then have 3 to 4 days off. Others may opt to work part time or only on weekends.

The demand for nurses is projected to remain high. This leads to job security and advancement opportunities, as well as attractive salaries and benefits packages.

What will I earn?
According to a January 2006 survey, Kansas City nurses earned the following average hourly wages.

- **Certified Nurse Assistant**
  $9.08 to $13.56
- **Licensed Practical Nurse**
  $12.85 to $19.08
- **Registered Nurse**
  $19.03 to $29.15
- **Advanced Practice Nurse**
  $26.24 to $40.99

The Right Career, Right From the Start
Hillary Allee is passionate about her career as an R.N. at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics. Her work with new diabetic patients requires communicating, teaching and reassuring patients and their families. Hillary earned her bachelor’s degree in nursing from Central Missouri State University in Warrensburg; scholarships covered part of her education. Her future goals include gaining experience in cardiac and neonatal intensive care and earning a master’s degree to work as a pediatric nurse practitioner.

Taking the Long Road to Become a Nurse
After success as a teacher, manager and business consultant, Mel Bowen believes nursing is the right career for her. Mel completed the Research College of Nursing accelerated option, a one-year bachelor of science in nursing program. She is able to draw on her past job skills in her work as an R.N. at Research Medical Center. Mel likes being part of a health care team that emphasizes total care for patients, including physical, emotional and social problems.

Second Career Brings Double Rewards
Starting as a hospital secretary, Chrissy Kellgren took advantage of North Kansas City Hospital’s cross training program to become a nurse assistant. After earning her LPN, she fell in love with working with oncology patients and their families. Her employer paid her tuition and books so she could obtain her associate degree and R.N. Chrissy, a single mom, says, “It was tough to finish school but worth it. My schedule fits spending time with my kids.” Her goals include earning a bachelor’s degree in nursing, gaining more work experience in the ICU and becoming a certified nurse anesthetist.

Educational Assistance Pays Off
Chad Sadler likes being a friend his patients can rely on when they are sick. Starting as a CNA, Chad worked full time at St. Mary’s Manor while attending Penn Valley Community College’s LPN evening/weekend program full time. Financial assistance from the Workforce Investment Act helped pay for his LPN courses. When he graduated, Chad was promoted to charge nurse and became responsible for monitoring patients’ well-being and supervising CNAs and medicine techs. Chad’s already working toward his next goal — enrolling in an R.N. bridge program.

LPN Uses ‘Bridge’ Program For Transition
The Full Employment Council is helping Chandelin Chase reach her goals for a nursing career. Through their Youth Opportunity program, she received CNA training and an internship. Chandelin now is working in home health on weekends and attending an LPN program at Penn Valley Community College during the week. She’s applied for a $1,000 Youth Opportunity scholarship and is aiming for her R.N. and associate degree through a bridge program.

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