

# Exploring Health Careers: High School Students

Career exploration is a real learning experience. You don't have to make any definite career decisions. Instead, you make new discoveries about yourself and the world of work. While you are exploring, learn as much as possible about each health occupation. Find out the following:

- Where, how, and why the health worker performs this kind of work?
- What skills and knowledge does he or she need?
- What is the work setting like?
- Does the job involve working alone or with others?
- What are the minimum job requirements in this profession?
- Is licensure, professional certification, or registration a factor in gaining employment?
- How much does the job pay?
- What are the advancement possibilities?
- What is the job picture where you live and elsewhere in the country?

How do you start exploring health careers? That's easy. You've already started by just reading this. But don't stop here. Read more about health careers. Visit your school or public library. Write to the professional health organizations and to the schools that provide training for health occupations.

The information you'll get from books and pamphlets can be very helpful, but it's no substitute for your own firsthand investigation. This requires one special ingredient—you. You must explore by doing. Investigate your health career potential by trying these activities:

**Visit a hospital, laboratory, or other health facility.** Most institutions welcome the opportunity to show their facilities to interested students. The institutions may schedule regular, or by appointment, guided tours. A hospital tour, for example, will give you a good overall picture of the many different departments and jobs which are part of medical care. You'll also learn about the hospital's special services and programs and how they help the community.

**Visit schools offering careers in health.** Like health facilities, most schools offer tours or hold open house days where you can meet teachers and students, find out more about the profession, determine what training is involved, and learn about admissions requirements. Some schools even permit prospective students to spend a day on campus, attend class, and get a preview of student life. The admissions office at the school should be contacted to make any necessary arrangements.

**Talk to health professionals and students in health training.** You'll receive an outlook on the career and obtain information you won't find in a book. Ask them many questions, such as the following:

- How did you become interested in and choose your particular field?
- How difficult is the training?
- What happens during a typical student day or workday?
- What do you like the most- and the least- about your chosen profession?

You can meet health professionals and students through exploring many of the activities described here. Your family doctor, school nurse, or guidance teacher may also assist you.

**Work in a health facility or agency.** A part-time or summer job in a hospital, nursing home, laboratory, or other health facility or agency can give you first-hand experience. Generally, you will have an opportunity to observe trained health professionals in action and to perform simple tasks. Start your job hunt by making a list of potential health employers, and then contact the Director of Personnel of each facility or agency. Find out whether they hire part-time or summer student help and, if so, how you can qualify. Summer jobs are often hard to obtain so it's important to contact potential employers early (several months before the summer season).

**Volunteer in a health facility or agency.** It is not always possible to get a job, but almost anyone can volunteer. Usually, the only requirements are that you have some free time (three or four hours per week) and that you are interested in helping others. Hospitals, nursing homes, social service agencies, correctional institutions, and senior citizens day care centers are among the places where volunteers can be found. Unlike a job where certain work is assigned, volunteer positions are flexible. Every effort is made to assign volunteers to areas of their choice. In general, volunteers provide services which support or compliment those of the paid staff.

**Join health career clubs or programs.** Many schools and community organizations sponsor activities which allow you to explore health career occupations. The Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Explorers have special health career programs.

Many secondary and post-secondary schools have health career clubs. If your school doesn't, you can help start one. Some high schools have prevocational health programs. There is a national student organization for students enrolled in these programs called the Health Occupations Students of America or HOSA.

While you are exploring, keep an open mind. Investigate many careers, not only those with which you are familiar. Remember, the more information you get now, the better your career decision will be later.

Each year many interested and qualified students give up on a health career simply because they have not explored alternate career choices when their first choice wasn't possible. An example is an aspiring medical student who is not admitted to a medical school and leaves the health field entirely.

The health field is vast; in it you'll find many related careers where you can contribute and find personal satisfaction. The health field doesn't want to lose your talent, so have other options ready.

*Source: Health Careers Guidebook, US Department of Labor/US Department of Health and Human Services.*