

4 IN-DEMAND HEALTH CARE JOBS

Dental assistants, medical laboratory technicians, registered nurses and physiotherapists are the tops

By Lisa Evans

Jobs in health care consistently dominate the list of the top 50 jobs in Canada, compiled by *Canadian Business* based on Statistics Canada data. An aging population and a steady stream of retirees mean Canada's health care system will soon become overburdened, resulting in increased demand for skilled professionals.

Health care workers today are also least likely to be found on the unemployment line; the average unemployment rate for health care workers falls between 1.3 to 2.6 per cent only, while unemployment rates for all sectors fluctuate between seven to 11 per cent.

What does this mean for newcomers?

While demand for skilled health care professionals is high, most health care occupations are regulated, meaning internationally trained professionals' credentials need to be accredited by a licensing body in order for them to practise in Canada. For newcomers seeking to work in the sector, simply having practical experience is not considered sufficient.

In 2009, the federal government, in recognition of the need for foreign-educated health care professionals to fill the labour gap, invested \$50 million to improve foreign qualification recognition. Certain professions including nursing, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, medical laboratory technologists, pharmacy technicians and physicians now have their qualifications assessed within one year and many offer bridging programs that help newcomers update their skills to match the requirements of the respective professional regulatory body.

According to WorkinginCanada.gc.ca, the Government of Canada's main newcomer resource for employment information including current job opportunities and future forecasted demand, the

top in-demand health care professions are dental assistants, medical laboratory technicians, registered nurses and physiotherapists.

[1] Dental assistants

A dental assistant works under the supervision of a dentist. They work with patients prior to and after the dentist meets with the patient and assists the dentist during certain dental procedures. According to the Canadian Dental Assistants' Association, average salaries range from \$15 to \$25 per hour, or \$30,000 to \$40,000 per year.

Education

Dental assistant programs vary across the country. Most are 18 months in length and require a secondary school diploma with biology and chemistry. To become accredited, all graduates of the program are required to complete the national exam, a two-part clinical practice and written exam administered by the National Dental Assisting Examining Board. Foreign-trained dental professionals are eligible to complete the exam after having their academic credentials assessed.

[2] Medical technologists

The ever-increasing use of technology has created a demand for workers with a combination of IT skills and knowledge of the health care industry. Demand is especially high for diagnostics and medical imaging workers. Salaries range from \$40,000 to \$80,000, depending on the province and years of experience.

Education

Lab technologists require a college diploma in medical lab technology as well as a six- to 14-month assistant or technician course. Medical radiation technologists require a college diploma or university degree, a diploma in medical radiation studies and must pass the Canadian Association of Medical

Radiation Technologists' national certification exam. Foreign-trained professionals may qualify for the nine-month-long bridging program for medical laboratory technicians, offered through Mohawk College in Hamilton, Ontario. The program is divided into three semesters and consists of theory and laboratory sessions at the college, along with a clinical placement.

[3] Nurses

Nursing is one of the most heavily populated professions in Canada. Employment in nursing has been growing steadily since 2003. The Canadian Nurses Association projects a shortage of 113,000 registered nurses by 2016. While nursing is a very physically demanding profession, there are many options and opportunities to specialize. A typical full-time annual salary for an RN ranges from \$70,000 to \$80,000, depending greatly on the region.

Education

Nursing is a regulated profession, meaning applicants must meet the requirements of the College of Nurses. There are three types of nursing careers in Canada. Registered practical nurses (RPNs) — also known as licensed practical nurses (LPNs) — require a two-year diploma in practical nursing that can be completed at a community college. Because an RPN's education is less comprehensive, they are most often placed with patients with stable and predictable conditions. Registered nurses (RNs) complete either a collaborative college-university nursing program or a four-year university nursing program leading to a bachelor of science in nursing or a bachelor of nursing. An RN's education is more comprehensive and therefore they are often responsible for taking care of patients with more complex needs. Nurse practitioners are RNs with advanced university education.

Foreign-trained nurses are required to have their credentials certified by the regulatory body

and must write the Canadian Registered Nurse Examination. Bridge programs are available, but the waiting list is often very long.

[4] Physiotherapists

A physiotherapist works with patients who suffer from limited mobility and treat pain, disease or injury. The scope of the practice of the profession has grown as certification has moved to the master's level, meaning physiotherapists are able to tackle more than the musculoskeletal system and are branching out into problems that involve the cardiovascular, respiratory and nervous systems. Private sector practices have expanded as the public has become more aware of the benefits of physiotherapy and no longer require a doctor's note to visit a physiotherapist. Salaries vary considerably from public to private practice, ranging from \$30 to \$50 per hour or \$57,000 to \$96,000 per year.

Education

There are 14 physiotherapy programs in Canada. All programs are at the master's level, are 24 to 30 months in length, and require an undergraduate degree to qualify. International applicants with an equivalent undergraduate degree must have their credentials checked by the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators. All graduates of the physiotherapy program as well as internationally trained physiotherapists must complete the physiotherapy competency exam — a national written and practical exam — in order to become accredited. Internationally trained professionals whose credentials do not meet Canadian standards are invited to participate in a bridging program. These one-year programs, offered through the University of Toronto and the University of Alberta, are designed to transition newcomers into the Canadian health care system and prepare applicants to do the physiotherapy competency exam. 🍁