

Career Series Articles

Health care still needs new blood

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For the past decade, careers in health care have been mainstays in the Top Ten list of fastest-growing occupations. While some jobs such as construction and real estate sales are subject to occasional lulls in the economy, careers in health care will continue to be in high demand, often providing some of the most lucrative incomes with a manageable commitment to monetary investment and time for training and education—usually about two years.

People who enter health care do so with a variety of motivations. Interest in helping others, the challenges of science and medicine, and the stability of a career field that doesn't succumb to economic whims are all good reasons individually or in combination to explore health-care careers.

A variety of choices within health care allows workers to decide if they want to work primarily and directly with patients, as a nurse or emergency medical technician would; or with limited patient contact as a diagnostic or treatment specialist might, providing radiation treatments or assisting with surgery; or even behind the scenes in health information management or medical records.

"The need for health care workers is continually growing as the population ages," said Dr. Neal Henning, Dean of Workforce Development at Florida Community College's North Campus.

Henning believes health care careers are always good choices. Because of nationwide demand, these are highly-mobile careers, a smart consideration for someone with a military spouse who may be required to move frequently.

Many entry-level health-care careers are a career destination in their own right, as well as stepping stones to advanced degrees and advanced responsibilities.

If someone has a goal of becoming an M.D., they can count on many years of school and years of paying back loans. But some of the most high-demand, high-wage health-care careers, such as physical therapist assistant, take a relatively short time commitment—about two years of full-time studies.

Physical therapist assistants perform treatment components under the direction and supervision of physical therapists. These might include exercise, massage, electrical stimulation, ultrasound, traction and applications of heat and cold. They work closely with patients suffering from accidents and injuries, debilitating diseases, stroke and injuries. Some specialize in areas such as sports injuries.

Gloria Young, Ed. D., is FCCJ's Physical Therapist Assistant program manager. A physical therapist for 34 years, Young has much to say about the program and the career choice—some of it praise and some of it advice for those interested in exploring health-care careers.

"This is a limited access program. Not everyone who applies will be admitted and the competition can be tough. We can presently accommodate 32 students," she says "but we have applied for a grant that will allow us to expand the program to meet the needs locally."

Young points to the high anticipated growth both locally and nationally, and the exceptional rate of pay as very good reasons for interested students to explore the career.

The occupational growth projected by the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation is an increase more than four percent annually, among the highest growth figures statewide. Nationally the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook projects the field to expand nearly 30 percent by 2014, considered much faster growth than average.

Young's students are required to complete internships at a variety of facilities, which have the potential to become employment after completing the program and achieving state licensure. Young cites an average hourly rate of \$22-\$35, with potential to earn better than \$50,000 annually depending upon the facility.

Young advises prospective students to take the pre-requisites in advance. There are specific requirements, and students will have to pass a state licensure exam after completing the program. Of recent graduates, about 80 passed on first attempt. The program has a 100 percent employment rate.

The Physical Therapist Assistant program tuition at FCCJ costs about \$5,000, excluding books and other expenses. The program is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education. For more information call 904.766.5574 or visit www.fccj.edu.

*Tuition and fees are subject to change by action of the College's District Board of Trustees. Current tuition and fees will be posted at the time of registration.