Certified Nursing Assistants and Nursing Aides - Career Overview

By Andrea Santiago

Health Careers Expert

Certified Nursing Assistants - Overview:

A Certified Nurse Assistant, or CNA, is also known as a nursing aide, nurse’s aide, or orderly. CNAs typically work under the supervision of a nurse or other licensed healthcare provider. Some CNAs also work as home health aides. CNAs usually work in nursing homes or hospitals, to help with daily living tasks such as bathing, eating, and dressing.

Certified Nursing Assistants also help with cleaning, moving the patient, and in some cases, taking vital signs such as temperature, pulse rate, and blood pressure.

A nursing aide, or nursing assistant may also be known as a home health aide when working in a patient’s home instead of in a nursing home or hospital. Not all home health aides are certified nursing assistants, however.

Demand and Projected Job Growth for Certified Nursing Assistants and Nurse Aides:

Job growth for nursing aides in general (including statistics for in-home aides and those working in health facilities) is projected at about 28% for the ten year period ending in 2016. For home health aides specifically, growth is projected at 49% which is the highest projected growth rate of any health care profession, which is why home health care is included in the Top Medical Jobs list.
Should You Be a CNA? Pros and Cons of CNA / Nursing Aide Jobs:

This career choice offers a vast availability of jobs, job growth, and low barrier of entry – training is relatively easy to obtain and takes only a few weeks. However, the physical and emotional strain can be high, and the pay is low. While there is not much career advancement opportunity for nursing aides, working as a CNA or nursing aide can be a great stepping stone to other more advanced health careers.

Education, Licensure, and Certification:

As stated above, requirements are not extensive for CNA careers. Certification requirements vary by state, and by employer. Most nursing assistants who work in a facility are required to have some sort of training as such, usually a minimum of 75 hours. Certification is available but not required for many jobs. If you work as a home health aide through an agency, you may also be required to have a certification. At the very least, applicants should at least have CPR/lifesaving certification.

Courses are offered at many vocational or tech schools, or healthcare trade schools. According to AllAlliedHealthSchools.com, a CNA program can be completed in a matter of weeks, ranging from 6-12 weeks in duration.

Salary for Certified Nursing Assistants and Nursing Aides:

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nursing aides such as certified nursing assistants earn an average range of about $10.00 an hour, up to over $12.00 per hour, which equates to $20,000 - $24,000 annually. The top 10% of nursing aides earned $14.99 per hour, nearly $30,000 per year. Additionally, CNAs receive about one week of vacation.