



Advice for Community College Students

from the National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions

If you are a community college student and you want to pursue a health career, this article is for you.

Exploring Health Professions

Before you embark on any health profession, do your research about that profession. Excellent health professions that can be pursued through a two-year, community college education, include:

- Dental Hygienist or Dental Assistant
- Emergency Medical Technician/ Paramedic
- Medical Laboratory Technician
- Pharmacy Technician
- Radiologic Technologist
- Registered Nurse
- Respiratory Therapist
- Sonographer
- Veterinary Technician

Then there are the health professions that typically require a bachelor's degree followed by post-college education, including:

- Acupuncturist
- Allopathic (MD) or Osteopathic (DO) Physician
- Athletic Trainer
- Audiologist
- Chiropractor
- Dentist
- Genetic Counselor
- Health Administrator
- Naturopathic Physician
- Occupational Therapist
- Optometrist
- Pharmacist
- Physical Therapist
- Physician Assistant
- Podiatrist
- Public Health professional
- Speech-Language Pathologist
- Veterinarian

Two central places where you can find links to reliable information about numerous health professions are:

- NAAHP Student Resources: www.naahp.org/student-resources/links-of-interest
- The Bureau of Labor Statistics website: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/home.htm>.

Choosing your Community College

If you choose a health profession that requires two years of education and training, seek a community college that offers the training for that profession. Contact the Program Director to discuss your interest and learn more about their admissions requirements and curriculum.

If you are planning to attend a community college for two years and then transfer to a four-year college/university, you can get an excellent head start toward completing your bachelor's (undergraduate) degree. Many community colleges offer associate's degrees in science. As part of the associate's degree, you may be able to meet admissions requirements to transfer seamlessly to universities in the same state as the community college. Community college students can often transfer up to 60 semester hours of course credit

from their community college to the college/university where they transfer for their bachelor's degree. As part of earning an associate's degree, you might take introductory science courses in Biology, Chemistry, and Physics. By gaining a foundation in these science courses at the community college, you will be ready to take upper-level science courses when you transfer to your four-year college/university. Work closely with your community college academic advisor to make sure that you are taking courses that will facilitate the transfer to the four-year college/ university where you get your bachelor's degree. It would also make sense to find and read the prehealth advising websites at the four-year colleges to which you hope to transfer. Finally, if you choose to start your college education at a community college, prioritize developing effective time management skills and study strategies and strive toward excellent grades, especially if you hope to transfer to a four-year college/university and then go on for post-college professional education.

Gaining Experience

An important attribute for anyone who is planning to pursue a health profession is ensuring that you know “what you're getting yourself into” before making a significant investment of time and money. Students considering a health profession should seek direct experience, preferably hands-on experiences with patients, before making this commitment.

Learning from Health Professionals

After reading about the profession, you may want to try to find a professional in your field of interest. Speaking with them about their work – its rewards and frustrations – will inform your decision. If they allow you, you might be able to shadow them to learn directly from a practitioner what is required to be successful in that health profession. Whether you are looking for a two-year degree or are planning for a post-college health profession, discussions and shadowing can provide a useful foundation for decision making.

Volunteering

Whereas discussions and shadowing give you one individual's perspective on their role in health care, spending time as a volunteer in a health care setting will give you a feel for the day-to-day operations and environment. It can help you gain a sense of whether you'd enjoy working in a hospital or clinic, and you would be providing a service to the community by participating.

Certification Programs

Although volunteering is a wonderful and educational experience, some volunteers are frustrated that they typically cannot provide direct, hands-on patient care. Having a certification/license that shows successful education and training can be helpful for individuals who want to provide patient care. Training and certification are often necessary in order to provide certain types of patient care. Community colleges are places where this kind of training is often available. Examples of training that can lead to certification for direct patient care include: Certified Nursing Assistant, Medical Assistant, and Emergency Medical Technician. To achieve certification, students are required to pass a written test and a skills test. Community college training allows students plenty of practice opportunities for the skills that are necessary. Taking advantage of your time at community college to obtain such training and continuing to use those skills by working or volunteering after you transfer to a four-year school is something you can do that will strengthen your eventual application to professional schools.

Good luck!

Best of luck to you as you investigate and prepare for your chosen health profession. You will need informed motivation, hard work and focus to succeed, but with the support of advisors, friends, and family, you can make it happen.