Article: Health and Medicine - Behind the Scenes

Summary

This article covers the following jobs:

- Biomedical Scientist
- Clinical Engineer
- Clinical Technologist
- Community Pharmacist
- GP Practice Manager
- Health Records Clerk
- Health Service Manager
- Hospital Pharmacist
- Medical Laboratory Assistant
- Medical Physicist
- Medical Receptionist
- Medical Secretary
- Pharmacy Technician.

The job descriptions are only a brief summary. You should find out more about the careers that interest you.

Management and administration

Health service managers are responsible for running hospitals, health centres and other health services.

There are also people who work in administration, doing things such as looking after health records, typing letters, working on a reception desk and arranging appointments.

Health Service Manager

Health service managers are responsible for the smooth running of hospitals, GP practices and other health services.

They might be responsible for staff, for example, recruiting administrative staff, organising shifts and setting up appraisal systems. They could manage the day-to-day operation of their service, and might also be responsible for financial management, including managing budgets.

They might decide on the best use of resources and might negotiate contracts for services provided by agencies, such as laundry or security. Managers might have to represent their department to the media.

Some managers have general responsibilities, while others might specialise in areas such as financial management, human resources, health records, health informatics, purchasing or information technology. Other managers might help to form health policies.

The National Health Service (NHS) Graduate Management Training Scheme is open to people with at least a 2:2 degree in any subject, and to people who have a professional qualification in health or management with an equivalent academic content. Suitably qualified people who already work for the NHS can also apply.

It is also possible to enter NHS management from administrative, clerical and other posts, gaining promotion through junior management positions after training and experience. Clinical staff also move into management roles.

Health Records Officer

Health records departments provide a service to patients, relatives, visitors, health professionals and government bodies. The department’s main objective is to create, store, and keep up to date a unique health record for all patients attending the hospital.

Health records clerks provide administrative and clerical support for patient care. They take and record patients' details; they use a computer system to keep, find and update records. They also file and find manual records such as case notes and test results.
They often have other duties. For example, they might prepare clinic lists, arrange further appointments and organise ambulance transport.

There are no formal entry requirements, although employers often look for evidence of some clerical and administrative experience. Some employers ask for GCSEs or equivalent.

It might be possible to work towards qualifications offered by the Institute of Health Records and Information Management (IHRIM).

To study for the IHRIM Certificate, you will usually need at least five GCSEs at grade C or above, including English and Maths.

**Medical Secretary**

Medical secretaries use a computer to type confidential letters and medical notes for doctors and other people employed in the health sector.

They organise the office, arrange filing systems, find and distribute medical reports and deal with correspondence and phone calls.

As a medical secretary, you will need word-processing and audio transcription skills, and good English language ability.

Although not always essential, many employers prefer applicants to have the level 3 Diploma for Medical Secretaries, awarded by City & Guilds/the Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Managers, Administrators and Receptionists (AMSPAR).

The usual minimum entry requirements for the Diploma are four GCSE passes at grade C or above.

**Medical Receptionist**

Medical receptionists welcome patients and other types of visitor. They work in GP surgeries, health centres, dental surgeries, hospitals and clinics.

They book appointments, usually using a computer system. They sometimes do text processing, prepare bills and deal with payments. They handle enquiries made by telephone or email.

You need strong communication skills, including clear speech and a good telephone manner.

Employers often look for skills such as keyboard skills, number, clerical and IT skills. There are some specialist college courses for receptionists.

You might be able to work towards a Certificate/Diploma in Medical Administration or an NVQ.

Many employers expect entrants to have a good general education with some GCSEs at grade C or above, including English Language.

**GP Practice Manager**

Practice managers work in doctors’ surgeries and health centres. They manage the financial, administrative and support functions that are needed for the efficient running of the practice.

Practice managers work closely with different healthcare professionals (for example, general practitioners and nurses). They manage administration staff, and things like patient services, buildings and IT services.

They are involved in planning for the future and finding new and efficient ways of delivering services.

Some entrants have gained promotion from an NHS administrative post. Some enter through the NHS graduate scheme and then gain skills in NHS management.

**Using physics and engineering**

Modern health care relies on sophisticated equipment and technology. These are used in diagnosis, treatment, monitoring and to help disabled people cope with everyday tasks.
The people who design and develop medical equipment do a large part of their work in laboratories or workshops but often also have contact with patients.

**Medical Physicist**

Medical physicists design, develop and maintain the complex equipment used to diagnose and treat patients in hospital.

This equipment includes:

- X-ray machines
- machines for measuring hearing, breathing, and heart rhythm
- lasers for surgery
- artificial arms, legs and hip joints
- implants, such as heart valves.

Medical physicists set up equipment, for example, calculating the precise, safe dose needed to treat cancer in radiotherapy.

They also help hospitals to choose new equipment to buy, and then train staff in how to use it properly and safely.

To become a medical physicist, you'll need a degree in healthcare science with medical physics pathways, or to follow a relevant degree with postgraduate training in the NHS.

**Clinical Engineer**

Clinical engineers apply science and engineering principles to help people with medical problems.

They design and develop technology including prostheses (artificial limbs and joints), robotic surgery, cardiovascular devices such as artificial arteries, and diagnostic equipment like ultrasound and X-ray machines.

They may work in hospitals, university research departments and medical equipment manufacturing companies.

The usual requirement for this career is a relevant degree or HND.

**Clinical Technologist**

Clinical technologists look after the equipment used in hospitals to diagnose illness, treat patients and monitor the results.

They maintain, service and sometimes develop equipment, in areas such as radiotherapy, ultrasound and dialysis.

Clinical technologists work closely with people such as doctors, nurses, radiographers and medical physicists. Their work also brings them into contact with patients.

To become a clinical technologist, you'll need a degree in healthcare science (clinical engineering), or to follow a relevant degree with postgraduate training in the NHS.

**Medical laboratory work**

There are people who work in medical laboratories, which are usually in hospitals. Their job is to test and examine samples taken from patients, for example, of their blood or body tissues. This helps doctors to diagnose and monitor disease and illness.

**Biomedical Scientist**

Biomedical scientists test and examine medical samples, for example, of blood and tissues, helping doctors to diagnose, treat and monitor disease.

They work in laboratories, using sophisticated equipment including automated testing machines, microscopes and computers. They also use more traditional techniques, such as growing tissue cultures on petri dishes.

There are several areas of specialisation, including blood transfusions, looking for signs of disease in tissue samples and studying micro-organisms.
Biomedical scientists carefully record their findings, often on computers, and use their knowledge and test results to advise and support doctors.

To become a biomedical scientist, you usually need a degree that is accredited by the Institute of Biomedical Science. Entry as a trainee can also be possible with A levels, working towards a degree by day-release.

**Medical Laboratory Assistant**

Medical laboratory assistants support the work of biomedical scientists. They have a number of tasks in medical laboratories, including:

- making up chemical solutions
- labelling blood and tissue samples
- looking after equipment stocks, ordering replacements when needed
- cleaning and sterilising equipment
- carefully removing waste.

They also record and study experiment results, often using a computer. Some specialise in different types of work, such as collecting blood samples from patients.

There are no set entry requirements, although employers might ask for GCSEs. You might need one or more from English, Maths and Science.

**Medicines**

Hospitals keep a large amount of medicines. Also, GPs prescribe treatments that patients can buy from a community (high street) pharmacy.

The patient can also buy some treatments ‘over-the-counter’ at a community pharmacy (they don't need a prescription).

The people who prepare and give advice on drugs and medicines are trained in a subject called pharmacy.

**Hospital Pharmacist**

Hospital pharmacists make sure patients receive the right medicines and take these medicines safely. They work closely with doctors, nurses, pharmacy technicians and other medical staff to ensure that patients receive the best treatment.

They give advice to doctors on the most appropriate drug treatments, the correct dosage, and any likely reactions between different treatments or foods that the patient is taking.

In most hospitals, pharmacists have direct contact with patients on the ward, checking their medical history, giving advice on how to take medicines and monitoring for side-effects.

Most medicines arrive at the hospital already made up, although the pharmacist might have to mix ingredients to make things such as liquids and tablets for one-off treatments.

There are a number of specialist areas, including cancer care, older adults, palliative care (terminally ill patients) and outpatient care (patients who go to hospital but who don't have to stay overnight).

Hospital pharmacists usually supervise a team of technicians who are responsible for routine tasks such as counting out tablets and putting labels on medicines.

To become a hospital pharmacist, you need to complete an approved degree in pharmacy, followed by a year's further training and an examination.

**Community Pharmacist**

Community pharmacists supply and sell medicines to patients on prescription. They also sell 'over-the-counter' medicines and remedies that people can buy without needing a prescription.

They advise people on how to use medicines safely. They also give advice on general health issues such as healthy eating, family planning and giving up smoking.
Most medicines arrive at the pharmacy ready-made, although the pharmacist might sometimes have to mix ingredients to make things such as tablets, powders and ointments.

Community pharmacists often supervise technicians who do routine work such as counting out tablets and labelling medicines.

Community pharmacists work in places such as high street chemists' shops, rural pharmacies, supermarket pharmacy counters and health centres.

To become a community pharmacist, you need to complete an approved degree in pharmacy, take a year's further training and pass an examination.

**Pharmacy Technician**

Pharmacy technicians help and support pharmacists. They work in places such as community pharmacies (for example, high street chemists' shops), hospitals and companies that make medicines.

In community pharmacies, they check prescriptions and follow the instructions to prepare medicines, for example, counting out tablets and measuring liquids.

They give customers advice on how to use medicines safely, and discuss possible side-effects with them.

Technicians in hospitals prepare medicines to prescriptions and make sure the wards have enough of each medicine to treat patients. They also give advice to patients.

In pharmaceutical companies, technicians help pharmacists to research and develop new drugs. They manage the day-to-day running of the laboratory, for example, setting up and clearing away equipment and recording experiment results.

Employers will usually look for four GCSEs (A*-C), including English, Maths and Science. You'll follow a two-year work-based training programme, including studying for qualifications.

**Further Information**

**Contacts**

- **Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Managers, Administrators and Receptionists (AMSPAR)**
  
  Tel: 020 7387 6005  
  Email: info@amspar.com  
  Website: [www.amspar.com](http://www.amspar.com)

- **Institute of Physics and Engineering in Medicine (IPEM)**
  
  Address: Fairmount House, 230 Tadcaster Road, York YO24 1ES  
  Tel: 01904 610821  
  Email: office@ipem.ac.uk  
  Website: [www.ipem.ac.uk](http://www.ipem.ac.uk)

- **Health Careers**
  

- **NHS Graduate Management Training Scheme**
  
  Email: Graduatescheme@leadershipacademy.nhs.uk  
  Website: [www.nhsgraduates.co.uk](http://www.nhsgraduates.co.uk)

- **Royal Pharmaceutical Society**
  
  Address: 1 Lambeth High Street, London SE1 7JN  
  Tel: 0845 2572570  
  Email: support@rpharms.com  
  Website: [www.rpharms.com](http://www.rpharms.com)

- **NHS Wales Careers**
  
  Publisher: National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare  
  Email: abm.wedsteam@wales.nhs.uk
Related Careers

- Sterile Services Technician
- Medical Receptionist
- Biomedical Scientist
- Pharmacy Technician
- Practice Manager
- Clinical Engineer
- Health Service Manager
- Clinical Technologist
- Community Pharmacist
- Hospital Pharmacist
- Medical Physicist
- Medical Secretary
- Medical Laboratory Assistant
- Health Records Officer
- Genetic Counsellor