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Medical and Health Services Management Careers, Jobs and Training Information

Medical and Health Service Management Career Overview

In the healthcare business, effective management is needed to ensure quality services are provided to those in need. Health services and medical managers include those people who supervise, direct, plan, and coordinate healthcare. Generalist manager positions supervise entire systems and facilities while specialist positions manage particular services or clinical departments.

Because of the fast-changing financing and structure of healthcare, health services and medical managers must face a complex regulatory system, a growing focus on preventive care, work restructuring, changing healthcare delivery systems, and technological innovations. These managers are responsible for improving the quality of healthcare as well as the effectiveness of healthcare facilities. Working in organizations, health services and medical managers try to find ways to make interrelated services, such as outpatient follow-up care and inpatient care, more efficient.

In a large facility, the top administrator generally has several assistant administrators to assist in decisions made each day. Medical records, surgery, health information, nursing, and therapy are clinical areas that assistant administrators might manage. Top administrators are responsible for managing the more tedious operations in small facilities. In a nursing home, these details could include a greater role in resident care, finance, admissions, facility operations, and personnel.

A clinical manager is responsible for coordinating activities with various managers, evaluating work and personnel, developing budgets and reports, as well as creating and executing procedures, policies, and objectives for their department. Clinical management positions require experience or training in specific clinical areas. For example, an administrator over medical records and health information generally has a bachelor's degree in either medical record administration or health information while a director of physical therapy must have extensive experience as a physical therapist.

The managers of group medical practices work alongside with physicians. In small medical groups, policy decisions are made by the physicians and office managers are responsible for the

business affairs; larger medical groups often hire a full-time administrator to run the day-to-day business and to handle business issues and policy decisions.

Large practices of around 50 doctors might employ a chief administrator who has a number of assistants to handle areas such as planning, budgeting, personnel issues, patient flow, billing and collection, and equipment outlays. A smaller group of 10 to 15 doctors may only have one administrator to handle all areas.

Health services and medical managers working in managed care facilities have similar responsibilities to corresponding managers of group practices; however, they manage larger staffs and work more in preventive care and community outreach than the managers of group practices. Health service and medical managers may be responsible for supervising numerous health system facilities that provide a variety of inpatient and outpatient services.

Because hospitals and nursing care facilities offer twenty-four hour care, the majority of health services and medical managers work long hours and could be called on the job at any time. Travel may also be necessary to examine satellite locations or to attend meetings.

Health services and medical managers are employed by ambulatory facilities run by local and State governments, insurance carriers, in-home healthcare services, elderly community care centers, and outpatient care facilities. 17 percent of managers work in either nursing care facilities or doctors offices and close to 37 percent work in hospitals. In 2002, there were 244,000 jobs held by health services and medical managers.

Training and Job Qualifications for Medical and Health Service Managers

To obtain a career as a health services or medical manager, a bachelor's degree is necessary for select entry-level positions at a departmental level in a small healthcare facility. Most generalist positions require a master's degree in health sciences, business administration, health services administration, public health, long-term care administration, or public administration. Various facilities and doctors' offices sometimes replace job experience for formal education.

Schools of medicine, business administration, public administration, public health, and allied health as well as many colleges and universities offer bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree programs in health administration. In 2003, The Accrediting Commission of Education for Health Services Administration listed 67 schools with accredited health services administration programs.

Admission to a graduate program is competitive and high grades are necessary for admission. Although some programs accept students with bachelor's degrees in health or business administration, the majority of programs favor those with a degree in a health profession or in a liberal arts field. Previous healthcare experience is also advantageous. The average length of a graduate program ranges from 2-3 years and contains course work in fields such as strategic planning, health information systems, accounting and budgeting, hospital organization and management, human resources administration, health economics, and marketing. Programs may require up to a year of supervised administrative experience and either encourages specialization

in a particular facility (medical groups, nursing care facilities, hospitals, or mental health facilities) or a generalist study of health administration.

After obtaining a master's degree in health services administration, one can expect to begin their career as a staff employee or department manager. Positions obtained vary according to the size of the health organization and the graduate's level of experience. A master's degree opens the door to acquiring jobs in consulting firms, mental health facilities, large group medical practices, nursing care corporations, and clinics. Some health facilities also offer staff position fellowships and residencies.

With a health administration bachelor's degree, a graduate can begin their career as an assistant department head or administrative assistant in nursing care facilities or hospitals.

Although most areas of health services and medical management do not require licenses, nursing care facility administrators in all 50 states must have a license to work. This is obtained by passing a State-approved training, completing a bachelor's degree, pursuing continuing education, and by passing a licensing examination.

Because health services and medical managers are responsible for hundreds of employees and very expensive equipment and facilities, they must be able to make effective decisions, interpret data, and understand information systems and finance. Strong leadership skills are necessary to motivate and execute their decisions. Communication skills, diplomacy, flexibility, and tact are critical because of their constant interaction with people.

A career as a health services or medical manager may advance by moving to a larger facility or by achieving a position as an assistant or associate administrator. These positions not only pay more, but require more responsibility.

Job and Employment Opportunities for Medical and Health Service Managers

Because of a growing health services industry, the employment of health services and medical managers is projected to expand more than the average occupation through 2012. Increasing opportunities will be found in outpatient care centers, health practitioners and doctor's offices, and in home healthcare services. Workers with good management and business skills and experience in the healthcare industry will have the greatest opportunities.

Jobs for health services and medical managers in hospitals are expected to increase at a slower rate than in other areas due to hospitals focusing on alternate care sites and to more constrained budgets; however, hospitals will still employ the highest number of health services and medical managers. The best job opportunities in hospitals will go to those managers with large facility experience. Because many hospital services are moving offsite due to improving technologies, employment is growing fastest in home healthcare agencies and in practitioners' offices. Specialized experience in a field will provide managers with increased opportunities. Managers working in these areas will be presented with an increased focus on preventative care, financial accountability, pressures of cost containment, and will focus on improving community health.

Healthcare management companies provide hospitals and organizations, and specific departments (physician recruiting, emergency, managed care contract negotiations, and information management systems) with various management services. Health services and medical managers will have employment opportunities with these companies.