Medical records administrators

All health care institutions keep records that contain medical information on each patient, including case histories of illnesses or injuries, reports on physical examinations, X-rays and laboratory tests, doctors' orders and notes, and nurses' notes.

These records are necessary for correct and prompt diagnosis and treatment of illnesses and injuries.

They also are used for research, insurance claims, legal actions, evaluation of treatment and medications prescribed, and in the training of medical personnel.

Medical information in hospitals also is used to evaluate patient care provided in the hospital and as a basis for health care planning for the community.

Medical record administrators direct the activities of the medical record department and develop systems for documenting, storing, and retrieving medical information.

They supervise the medical record staff, which processes and analyzes records and reports on patients' illnesses and treatment.

They train members of the medical record staff for specialized jobs, compile medical statistics required by State or national health agencies, and assist the medcial staff in evaluations of patient care or research studies.

Medical record administrators serving as department heads are a part of the the hospital management staff and participate fully in management activities.

As the administrators responsible for the medical information system, they may be required to testify in court about the records and record procedures.

The size and type of institution affect the duties and amount of responsibility assigned to medical record administrators.

In large hospitals, chief medical record administrators supervise other medical record administrators technicians, and clerks.

Smaller hospitals may employ only two or three persons in the medical record department; in nursing homes usually one person keeps the medical records.

In these cases a consulting medical record administrator usually advises technical and clerical personnel performing medical record functions.

Most of the 12,300 medical record administrators employed in 1976 worked in hospitals. The remainder worked in clinics, nursing homes, State and local public health departments, and medical research centers.

Some health insurance companies also employ medical record administrators to help determine liability for payment of their clients' medical fees.

Some medical record administrators work for firms that manufacture equipment for recording and processing medical data and develop and print health insurance and medical forms.

Many small health care faciltiies hire medical record administrators as consultants.

Preparation for a career as a medical record administrator is offered in specialized programs in colleges and universities.

Most programs last 4 years and lead to a bachelor's degree in medical record administration.

However, concentration in medical record administration begins in the third or fourth year of study, making transfer from a junior college possible.

One-year certificate programs also are available for those who already have a bachelor's degree and required courses in the liberal arts and biological sciences.

In 1977, there were 41 programs in medical record administration approved by the Council on Medical Education of the American Medical Association and the American Medical Record Association (AMRA).

High school courses that are useful include health, business administration, mathematics, and biology.

Training for medical record administrators includes both classroom instruction and practical experience. Anatomy, physiology, fundamentals of medical science, medical terminology, and medical record science are among the required scientific courses.

In addition, management courses such as hospital organization and administration, health law, statistics, data processing, and computer science are part of the curriculum.

Experience in the medical record departments of hospitals provides students with a practical background in applying standardized medical record practices, compiling statistical reports, analyzing data, and organizing medical record systems.

Graduates of approved schools in medical record administration are eligible for the national registration examination given by AMRA. Passing this examination gives professional recognition as a Registered Record Administrator (RRA).

There were about 5,000 employed RRA's in 1976, according to AMRA.

Medical record administrators must be accurate and interested in detail. They also must be able to communicate clearly in speech and writing. Because medical records are confidential, medical record administrators must be discreet in processing and releasing information.

Supervisors must be able to organize and analyze work procedures and to work effectively with other hospital personnel.

Medical record administrators with some experience in smaller health facilities may advance to positions as department heads in large hospitals or to high level positions in hospital administration.

Some coordinate the medical record departments of several small hospitals. Others move on to medical record positions in health agencies.

Many teach in the expanding programs for medical record personnel in 2-and-4-year-year colleges and universities.

Employment opportunities for graduates of approved medical record administrator programs are expected to be good through the mid-1980s.

Employment is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations, with the increasing use of health facilities as more and more people are covered by health insurance.

The detailed information required by third-party payers such as insurance companies and Medicare also will cause growth in the occupation.

More consultants will be needed to standardize health records in outpatient clinics, community health centers, nursing homes, and home care programs.

The importance of medical records in research and the growing use of computers to store and retrieve medical information also should increase the demand for qualified medical record administrators to develop new medical information systems.

Part-time employment opportunities also should be available in teaching, in research, and in consulting work for health care facilities.

The salaries of medical record administrators are influenced by the location, size, and type of employing institution, as well as by the duties and responsibilities of the position.

The average starting salary for medical record administrators in 1976 was $12,312 a year, according to a national survey conducted by the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. Top salaries averaged $14,916 a year, with some earning as much as $27,612.

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Army and Peace Corps want licensed practical nurses

Over the years many changes have taken place in the health care field, and perhaps one of the most outstanding examples is what has happened to practical nursing.

A while back, when a family illness called for nursing care, chances are the need was fulfilled by a "practical" — someone who bathed and fed the patient, cooked, and helped out generally.

Today the "practical" is a Licensed Practical Nurse. She, or he, as the case may be, is a skilled professional who works on a collaborative basis with other members of the health care team in hospitals, rehabilitation centers, clincis and other health care facilities.

The LPN's education and experience enable her to perform a variety of services, many of which involve the use of complex nursing techniques and instruments.

Her patients may be chronically ill or handicapped, accident victims, new mothers or babies, or heart attack victims whose recovery hinges on the specialized treatment provided by a modern coronary care unit.

The changing status of LPNs, along with the increasing demand for their services, has given the practical profession new mobility.

As a result, qualified LPNs can put their skills to work in cities, towns, villages, and rural areas throughout the country.

Positions are available in nursing homes, visiting nurse associations and other public health agencies, physicians' offices, school infirmaries, camps, industry, and private duty in patients' homes or in hospitals.

CONSULTATION between a nurse - midwife and physician takes place during a prenatal examination.

Opportunities are not limited to this country, however. The U.S. Army is recruiting LPNs as non-commissioned officers, the Peace Corps is urging them to serve overseas, and those who enjoy ocean voyages may find openings on SS Hope or on vacation cruise ships.

Besides having the advantage of offering widespread, diversified job opportunities, practical nursing pays well.

Salaries for LPNs vary according to responsibilities and geographic location of employment, but generally their earnings are about three-fourths of a registered nurse's salary.

Educational requirements consist of a one-year basic program in practical nursing at a state-approved school.

A high school diploma is necessary for admission, and applicants should have a fundamental knowledge of biology and other sciences.

At present, there are more than 1,300 schools located throughout the country.

The cost of attending a state approved school varies, with tuition ranging from no charge to more than $1,000.

However, scholarships and other means of financial assistance are usually available.

Following graduation, practical nurses are required to pass a state licensing examination

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