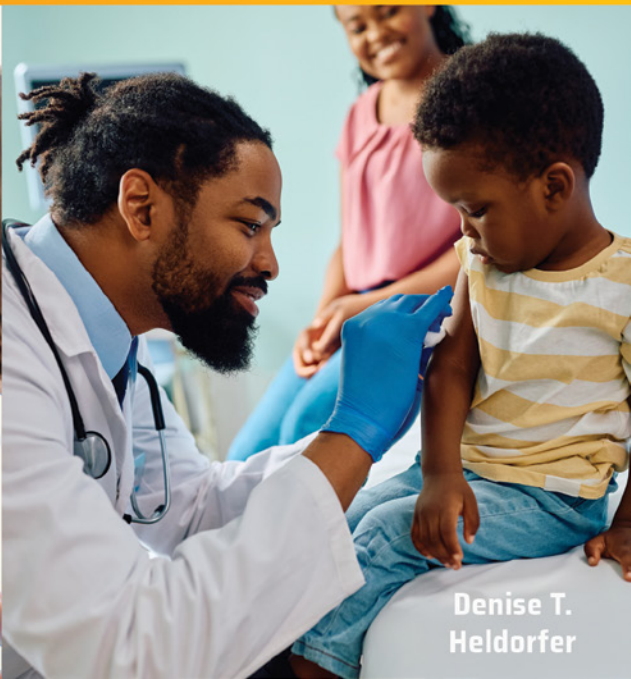




Exploring Careers in **HEALTH CARE**



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Heldorfer



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Nurse Practitioner

What Does a Nurse Practitioner Do?

Ann M. Murray's life transformed following her experience with the excellent care her son received after his car accident. "The nurses who cared for my son didn't just help him heal; they changed my life," Murray says. "Their compassion, knowledge, and dedication

inspired me to change careers. I went back to school, became a registered nurse, and eventually continued my education to become a family nurse practitioner."⁶

Historically, physicians primarily conduct physical examinations and illness consultations. However, in recent years, patient visits with nurse practitioners (NPs), also known as family nurse practitioners (FNPs), have become increasingly widespread due to the nationwide shortage of doctors.

NPs are registered nurses who have earned a postgraduate degree, enabling them to offer medical services comparable to those provided by physicians. The scope of practice for NPs varies by state. Most states allow full authority to practice independent of physician supervision, including assessing patients, developing treatment plans, prescribing medications, and ordering and reading diagnostic tests. The other states require NPs to work

A Few Facts

Number of Jobs

382,700 as of 2024*

Pay

Median annual salary of \$132,050 in 2024

Educational Requirements

Master's degree, national examination, state licensure

Personal Qualities

Strong communicator, critical thinking skills, compassion, time management, flexibility

Working Conditions

Physician offices, hospitals, clinics, research institutions, schools

Future Job Outlook

Growth of 35 percent through 2034

* Includes nurse practitioners, nurse anesthetists, and nurse midwives

under the supervision of a doctor who must approve certain medical decisions. Conversely, doctors are always able to practice independently. Each type of health care provider can choose to specialize in a particular area of medicine, with surgical specialties allowed exclusively for physicians.

About 70 percent of NPs work as FNPs in primary care medical practices, treating a wide variety of patients. These professionals focus on managing patient care in a comprehensive manner. They meet with patients for wellness and sick visits and create treatment plans for those with chronic conditions. They may also provide education, counseling patients on healthy lifestyles and disease prevention, including diet recommendations such as limiting salt or sugar intake.

Other NPs work in hospitals, or outpatient facilities such as clinics or urgent care centers. “There are so many possibilities for each NP. I have worked in urgent care, surgical services, and primary care,”⁷ notes Murray. In addition, there is an opportunity for NPs to work as research nurse practitioners in universities or in schools traditionally employing registered nurses.

A Typical Workday

An NP’s specific duties depend on their specialty, work setting, and state regulations. Regardless of these factors, most NPs report that their days are never exactly alike.

FNP Lauren Gutierrez begins her day at 8:30 a.m. reviewing messages, patient records, test results, and consulting notes. At about 9:00 she starts making her rounds to different patient rooms to perform physical exams, follow-up visits, and illness assessments. She typically sees patients until around 5:00 or 5:30 p.m. It is not uncommon for her to see fifteen to twenty patients per day. During and in between visits, she continues to review and update records via the online medical system. “The administrative part of my job is a continuous task throughout the day,” Gutierrez explains. Although record keeping is very important in ensuring continuity and accuracy of care, it seems that most NPs

Number One Job in America

“The recognition of the nurse practitioner profession as the No. 1 job in America reflects the incredible dedication, expertise and impact NPs bring to health care every day. NPs are uniquely equipped to address some of the most pressing health care challenges—ensuring that patients across the country have access to high quality primary and specialty care. Their commitment to patient-centered care is transforming lives, improving health outcomes, and reinforcing public trust in the health care profession.”

—Stephen A. Ferrara, president of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners

Quoted in Association of Advanced Nursing Professionals, “Nurse Practitioners Secure No. 1 Spot Across Three *U.S. News & World Report* Best Jobs Rankings,” January 15, 2025. www.aanp.org.

find the most job satisfaction in treating their patients. “Being part of improving their health is very rewarding,”⁸ Gutierrez says.

Oftentimes, NPs get to know their patients and their families quite well. Murray remarks, “What I enjoy most is getting to know my patients over time and being someone they trust.”⁹

Since some NPs are employed in other environments, their typical workdays vary from those in medical practices. NPs who work in hospitals attend to inpatients or outpatients in areas such as surgery, critical care, or emergency departments. Others collect data at research institutions in higher education and usually spend their days performing clinical trials or evaluating and reporting their findings. In schools NPs provide comprehensive health care services to students and staff, performing duties such as treating illnesses, administering medications, and providing counseling on health care.

Education and Training

Most NPs begin their education with a bachelor’s degree in nursing, becoming a registered nurse. By adding a master of science



As part of managing care, nurse practitioners do routine wellness visits as well as seeing patients who are ill. They counsel patients on ways to maintain good health and create treatment plans for people with chronic conditions.

in nursing (MSN), they are then equipped to perform many of the same functions as traditional physicians but with less time and financial commitment to their studies. The additional education takes an average of two years to complete. Some individuals decide to pursue their education another year or two if they wish to specialize in a certain area of health care, such as geriatrics, pediatrics, women's health, or mental health.

As part of their advanced nursing training, NPs experience firsthand learning via clinical rotations. Before beginning their career, NPs must pass a national certification examination and become licensed in their state of practice.

No matter which area of medicine they work in, ongoing education is vital for NPs. They have to stay current with the latest

advancements in their field, maintain their license and certification, and ensure that they are providing the best possible care for their patients. Vanessa Pomarico, an NP and faculty member at Fitzgerald Colibri Healthcare in Massachusetts, states, “Continuing education for nurse practitioners is one of the best ways to keep up with trending medical issues and important changes in treatment protocols.”¹⁰

Skills and Personality

NPs need to have sharp analytical and critical thinking skills. Deciphering test results and patient-reported symptoms is important for creating individual treatment plans. “I particularly enjoy the autonomy and scope of practice that comes with the nurse practitioner role. The ability to assess, diagnose and manage a wide range of health conditions allows me to use my clinical judgement and problem-solving skills daily,”¹¹ states Murray.

Compassion, empathy, and communication skills are also especially important in this profession. NPs need to be able to transfer the information they have gathered into an easy-to-understand format to patients and their families. They also must have patience in listening and answering questions. “You have to be compassionate, patient, and willing to meet people where they are,”¹² says Gutierrez.

Working Conditions

While most NPs work in medical practices, others are employed in hospitals, clinics, and educational institutions. Regardless of location, environments are typically fast paced, and health care teams must operate efficiently and cohesively to maintain patient safety and comfort.

In medical practices, NPs work during standard business hours. Some may have the option of working a shorter than full-time workweek. These settings typically include a group of care providers as well as medical assistants and possibly a supervising physician depending on the state of practice. NPs employed at

Source Notes

Introduction: Endless Possibilities in Health Care Employment

1. Jonathan Reece, interview by the author, May 25, 2025.
2. Reece, interview.
3. Terri Dreher Frykenberg, interview by the author, May 22, 2025.
4. Reece, interview.
5. Jennifer Parker, interview by the author, July 31, 2025.

Nurse Practitioner

6. Ann M. Murray, interview by the author, May 28, 2025.
7. Murray, interview.
8. Lauren Gutierrez, interview by the author, June 4, 2025.
9. Murray, interview.
10. Vanessa Pomarico, "The Importance of Continuing Education for Nurse Practitioners," Fitzgerald Colibri Healthcare, August 27, 2024. www.fhea.com.
11. Murray, interview.
12. Gutierrez, interview.
13. Katie Manni, "My Experience as a New NP During the Coronavirus Pandemic," American Association of Nurse Practitioners, January 13, 2021. www.aanp.org.
14. Gutierrez, interview.
15. Latrina Walden, "Five Types of Nurse Practitioner Specialties in High Demand," Latrina Walden, Exam Solutions, March 5, 2025. <https://shop.latrinawaldenexamsolutions.com>.
16. Quoted in American Association of Nurse Practitioners, "AANP Spotlights Five Critical Health Care Trends to Watch," January 3, 2024. www.aanp.org.

Dental Hygienist

17. Debbie Cannon, interview by the author, May 27, 2025.
18. Puja Balchandani, interview by the author, June 2, 2025.

Interview with a Nurse Practitioner

Kelsey Fryberger is a nurse practitioner for a family medical practice in Newark, Delaware. She has worked as a nurse practitioner for eight years. She answered questions about her career by email.

Q: Why did you become a nurse practitioner?

A: I became a nurse practitioner (NP) eight years ago after working as a bedside registered nurse for 14 years. I wanted to develop more autonomy and gain more responsibility. I discovered that there was a need for more nurse practitioners since the number of physicians had decreased. I also found out that nurse practitioners have the authority to perform many of the same functions as doctors.

I enjoyed taking care of patients as a nurse but wanted to be able to close the door and focus on one patient and one problem at a time. As a nurse I was often pulled in many directions while I was visiting with a patient. Oftentimes, other members of the health care team would come into the room with questions about other patients, to take blood work, or bring medications.

Also, since I planned to have a family, I was looking for a more flexible working environment. I wanted to get away from night and weekend shift work.

Q: Can you describe your typical workday?

A: I am based at two separate locations during the week, with my workplace varying depending on the day. My workday starts at 8:30 a.m. with reviewing phone and patient portal messages. I also check lab results and consult notes for the patients I am scheduled to see that day.

I begin seeing patients at 9:00. I see about sixteen patients a day and finish around 5:30 p.m. Some patients are there for follow-up, others for physical examinations. And there may also be emergency visits that need to be fit into my day.

Other Jobs in Health Care

Allergist	Occupational therapist
Anesthesiologist	Otorhinolaryngologist
Audiologist	Pharmacist
Cardiologist	Pharmacy technician
Dermatologist	Physical therapist
Endocrinologist	Physician assistant
Epidemiologist	Podiatrist
Fitness trainer and instructor	Psychiatrist
Gastroenterologist	Psychologist
General surgeon	Radiation technologist
Genetic counselor	Respiratory therapist
Gynecologist	Speech–language therapist
Immunologist	Urologist
Massage therapist	Veterinarian
Neurologist	X-ray technician

Editor's note: The online *Occupational Outlook Handbook* of the US Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics is an excellent source of information on jobs in hundreds of career fields, including many of those listed here. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* may be accessed online at www.bls.gov/ooh.

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