**Introduction**

**What do nurses do?**
Nurses work as part of a team and provide care for adults and children with physical or mental ill health. The job can vary from helping someone learn basic daily tasks to administering life-saving drugs. Whichever area of nursing you work in, you’ll be assessing, diagnosing, planning and evaluating treatment.

**What are the different fields of nursing?**
When you first train as a nurse, you’ll need to study for one of the four fields of nursing: adult, children’s (paediatrics), learning disabilities or mental health.

**How do I train to become a nurse?**
The traditional route is to take an approved full-time university pre-registration degree in nursing. If you already have a relevant first degree (such as in human biology or psychology), some universities will give recognition for this enabling you to complete the nursing degree over a shorter period. You’ll need to speak to each university you’re considering to see if you can get some accreditation. However, additional routes are being developed in England, including nursing degree apprenticeships, and the new nursing associate role would enable you to gain experience and then complete the nursing degree apprenticeship over a shorter period.

**Is there financial help to support me while I’m training to be a nurse?**
If you are taking a full-time pre-registration course in nursing in England, you will usually be eligible for student loans to pay for tuition and maintenance fees. Arrangements are different outside of England. As a nursing degree apprentice, you will receive a wage.
Visit the NHS Student Bursaries website for more information: [www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk)

**Nursing roles at a glance**
This section provides information about the work involved in the four main fields of nursing as well as specialist roles you may be interested in after qualifying. You can find more detailed information about all the nursing roles listed below on the Health Careers website at [www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/nursing](http://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/nursing)

There are also short videos about some of the roles which can be found at [www.youtube.com/HealthCareers](http://www.youtube.com/HealthCareers)

**Adult Nursing**
Adult nurses treat and care for adults of all ages with all types of health conditions. They manage numerous priorities and use clinical, technical, caring, counselling, managing, teaching and all aspects of interpersonal skills to improve the quality of patients’ lives, sometimes in difficult situations. Roles may be based in hospital wards, clinics and, increasingly, in community settings. You may work shifts to provide 24-hour care.

Your work as an adult nurse will involve:
- using your critical thinking skills, clinical knowledge, initiative and high levels of observation
- working in a fast-changing, demanding environment
- assessing what is best for the patient and acting on your decision
- a willingness to take responsibility for people’s wellbeing
- being part of a busy, multidisciplinary team that includes doctors, radiographers, physiotherapists and many others

**Children’s (paediatric) nursing**
Children’s nurses treat and care for children and young people from birth to 18 years of age. Children and young people can present with a wide range of conditions, and children’s nurses deal with a range of situations including babies born prematurely, teenagers who have sustained accidents and injuries, mental health and long-term conditions and life-limiting illnesses.

Children’s nurses work in partnership with the child or young person, their parents and carers to plan and deliver care. They work with other professionals, such as GPs, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists and health visitors to ensure young people enter adulthood in good health. Health problems can affect a child’s development and it’s vital to work with the child’s family or carers so that he or she does not suffer additionally from the stress of being ill.

Children’s nurses work on wards in hospitals, in specialist areas such as children’s intensive care, or in day care centres, hospices, child health clinics and in the child’s home. Like other fields of nursing, care is becoming more community-based. You may work shifts to provide 24-hour care.
Your work as a children’s nurse will involve:

- being able to handle the challenges posed by caring for someone who is sick and may be too young to express what’s wrong
- knowledge and ability to understand that a child or young person’s health can rapidly take a turn for the worse
- sensitivity and the ability to communicate without words
- the confidence to work in partnership with the patient’s family or carers
- teaching the child’s parents or carers what may need to be done to carry on with treatment at home

**Learning disability nursing**

Children identified as having a learning disability are living longer, more fulfilled lives into adolescence, adulthood and older age, and learning disability nurses play a vital role working across the whole life span in both health and care settings.

Learning disability nurses work to provide specialist healthcare and support to people with a learning disability, as well as their families and staff teams, to help them to achieve a fulfilling life.

Learning disability nursing is provided in settings such as education, and residential and community centres, as well as in patients’ homes, workplaces, schools, acute, community, mental health and prisons. You could specialise in areas such as research and education, physical or mental health, or the management and development of services.

Learning disability nurses work as part of a team alongside GPs, psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists, teachers, social workers, families and people with a learning disability themselves. If you work in a residential, acute or mental health setting, you may work shifts to provide 24-hour care.

Your work as a learning disability nurse will involve:

- a great deal of patience, sensitivity and excellent interpersonal/communication skills
- an ability to work across health and care system with a range of professions to negotiate and lead care for people with a learning disability
- a willingness to be adaptable, flexible and prepared to act as an advocate for those you support to ensure that they do not suffer discrimination
- the ability to work in a demanding and stressful environment

**Mental health nursing**

As many as one in four people will have a mental health problem at some point in their life, regardless of their age or background. Conditions range from personality and psychological disorders to neuroses and psychoses.

Nurses who choose to specialise in mental health – a complex and demanding area – work with GPs, psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists and others to help care for patients with mental illnesses. Increasingly, care is given in the community, with mental health nurses visiting patients and their families at home, in residential centres, in prisons or in specialist clinics or units. You may work shifts to provide 24-hour care.

This is a valuable role that provides much reward and satisfaction.

Your work as a mental health nurse will involve:

- autonomy in planning and delivering patient care within the healthcare team
- opportunities to specialise in areas such as alcohol and drug misuse
- excellent communication skills and an ability to empathise with people and understand their problems
- liaising with a patient’s family and listening to and advising those who care for the patient
- dealing with occasional aggression in a sensitive and effective way

**Other nursing roles**

These are roles you may choose to take up after qualifying in one of the four nursing fields. Find out more about the different nursing roles at: [www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/nursing](http://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/nursing)

**District nursing**

District nurses visit people of all ages, often in their own homes, GP surgeries or a residential or care home. Some patients may have dementia, others may have disabilities, be recovering after a hospital stay, or have a terminal illness. You may work shifts to provide 24-hour care.

You’ll need to qualify and work as a registered nurse and then complete a degree-level specialist practitioner programme in district nursing, which usually lasts for one academic year, before you can become a district nurse. Funding or sponsorship may be available from your employing trust.

This is a rewarding role as you can work one-to-one with patients and their families on an ongoing basis, which enables you to develop a trusting relationship while you improve their quality of life.

Your work as a district nurse will involve:

- working with a variety of people as part of a team with GPs, social services, voluntary organisations and NHS bodies, as well as the ability to work on your own
Careers in nursing

• being adaptable and the ability to put people at ease
• good organisational skills so you can plan care for all your patients, some of whom will have very complex care needs
• visiting patients as required to prescribe and administer medication and monitor health
• teaching patients or their families how to carry out procedures such as administering injections
• helping patients with personal hygiene
• carrying out annual health checks and delivering health promotion programmes

General practice nursing

General practice nurses work in GP surgeries as part of a primary care team that is likely to include doctors, nurses, therapists and pharmacists. In smaller practices, you may be the sole nurse, whereas in larger surgeries, you may share duties with general practice nurse colleagues. You may also be required to work flexibly, including some evenings and weekends. As the range of healthcare services provided in the community increases, the role of the general practice nurse is likely to expand and change.

To become a general practice nurse, you will need to first qualify as a registered nurse.

Your work as a general practice nurse will involve:
• treating small injuries
• assisting with minor operations carried out under local anaesthetic
• health screening
• family planning
• running vaccination programmes, for example protection against flu
• managing well woman clinics
• supporting the healthcare team in its monitoring of conditions such as diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure

Health visiting

Health visitors are registered nurses or midwives who have done additional training in community public health nursing to work with families of children under five in a specific geographical area. They work with parents who have newborn babies, offering support and informed advice from pregnancy until the child starts school at age 5. All new parents are entitled to a health visiting service, regardless of their situation and number of children, but a more intensive service is provided to families who would benefit from more health visiting support and time. The service provided to each family will vary according to an assessment of their needs. Health visitors are usually based in settings such as GP surgeries, children’s centres, community or health centres. They visit parents at home and run groups with colleagues such as nursery nurses, children centre staff and voluntary organisations.

This is a role that will appeal to those who like to work in teams or have sole responsibility for a caseload of families from the local area and want to work with autonomy, while remaining part of a healthcare team. You’ll have opportunities to progress and manage a team of health visitors or to other management roles.

You’ll need to qualify and be a registered nurse or midwife to start the Specialist Practitioner Health Visitor/Specialist Community Public Health Nurse (SCPHN/HV) postgraduate training programme.

The programme usually lasts a minimum of one year full-time and there are also some part-time courses available. If you have a degree, you could seek accreditation for your prior learning to enter a two-year graduate-entry pre-registration nursing programme followed by the one-year SCPHN/HV programme.

You may receive financial support from your employer, although this can depend on which course you take and where you live.

Pre-school children and their families will be your key focus, and your work as a health visitor will involve:
• supporting new parents and families in the care and development of their babies and pre-school children
• providing practical public health help and advice to people of all ages and backgrounds, aiming to prevent illness and promote good health
• working independently and being highly organised
• being confident and using your skills to deal with people in a variety of situations, some of which may be challenging

Neonatal nursing

Neonatal nurses focus on the care of newborn babies who are born prematurely or need specific care in the first few months of their life. They provide focused care for premature or ill newborns, or work exclusively with seriously ill newborns in a neonatal intensive care unit. You may work shifts to provide 24-hour care.

Often, premature babies have respiratory problems (which can be life-threatening if they are not treated promptly and monitored), birth defects, infection, health malformations and
problems requiring surgery. For both the neonate and their family, admission to the neonatal unit is a stressful time which needs to be recognised when planning and providing holistic care. Family-centred care is essential, where the parents and carers are regarded as equal partners in their baby’s care.

Your work as a neonatal nurse will involve:
• being a source of support to the baby’s family at a stressful and emotional time
• taking an active role in the multidisciplinary team looking after the child
• a strong level of empathy
• competence to operate in a busy, technical environment

Neonatal nursing training programmes are part of continuing professional development (CPD) and are normally studied as modules by registered nurses and midwives. As with other types of nursing, there are opportunities to progress to management, research and education, as well as into nurse consultant roles.

**Prison nursing**
Prison nurses are employed by the prison service, private providers or by the NHS to care for and treat patients who are in prison. Many prisoners have substance abuse or mental health problems, making nursing in this environment challenging. By improving mental and physical health, the care provided by prison nurses may help to lower re-offending rates, and therefore have a positive impact on prisoners, their families and the wider public.

A background in mental health or learning disability nursing may help. As with other types of nursing, you can undertake further training and apply for management roles. As a prison nurse, you may work shifts to provide 24-hour care. There are also job opportunities for nurses elsewhere in the criminal justice system such as police custody suites and immigration centres.

Your work as a prison nurse will involve:
• delivering care and treatment within a custodial setting
• developing positive relationships with prisoners and treating them with compassion
• developing excellent interpersonal skills
• treating and caring for individuals with substance abuse or mental health problems
• understanding the particular problems faced by your patients and those working in prisons

**School nursing**
School nurses work with schools and local communities to support the health and wellbeing of school-age children, young people and their families. School nurses work closely with pupils, parents, carers and teachers, offering support and advice on a range of issues from obesity to sexual health. They play a vital role in children’s development, carrying out immunisations and screening programmes, and managing medical conditions such as asthma and diabetes. They work closely with other agencies, such as social services, acting as a point of contact for child protection issues.

Nurses in this key role are usually employed by a primary care provider, local health authority, community trust or by individual schools.

It is possible to go straight into this role after qualifying as a registered nurse. However, experience of working with children, in child protection or health promotion, will be beneficial.

Many school nurses will also work towards the Specialist Practitioner – School Nursing/ Specialist Community Public Health Nurse qualification at degree and Master’s level.

Your work as a school nurse will involve:
• carrying out screening programmes
• raising awareness of and providing information on issues that could have a negative effect on health, such as smoking and drug and alcohol abuse
• administering immunisations and vaccines
• promoting healthy living and safe sex
• running health promotion or drop-in surgeries
• using excellent communication skills
• supporting children and young people with medical needs, such as asthma, diabetes, epilepsy or mental health problems and disability
• working as part of a safeguarding team
• working in partnership with teachers and families, contributing to social education and citizenship classes and providing training to teachers on healthcare issues
• adopting a non-judgemental approach and building trust with children and young people

**General resources**
**Royal College of Nursing**
[http://www.rcn.org.uk/nursing](http://www.rcn.org.uk/nursing)
The Royal College of Nursing’s website hosts a useful careers section, with information on qualifications and case studies detailing what a typical day as a nurse consists of. There’s also information on working in the UK as a foreign student and working abroad.

**Prospects**
[http://www.prospects.ac.uk/adult_nurse_job_description.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/adult_nurse_job_description.htm)
An overview of a role as an Adult Nurse, with links to profiles of similar roles.

**NHS Careers**
[https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing)
A comprehensive look at the sector from by far the biggest employer of nurses, featuring information on entry requirements and training, potential career paths and case
studies. The website also links to NHS Jobs (https://www.jobs.nhs.uk) which is where you’ll be able to search for employment opportunities within the NHS.

**Resources for working outside the NHS**

**Explore Health Careers**
http://explorehealthcareers.org/en/Field/6/Nursing
A very comprehensive resource, providing careers information and job descriptions for over thirty roles related to the Nursing sector. A US-based site, so some of the references to qualifications won’t be relevant.

**Carnival UK careers**
http://www.carnivalukcareers.co.uk/medical.html
Information about a medical careers at sea. The website also features a jobs board; search under the “Ship – medical” option.

**Travel Nursing**
https://www.travelnursing.com/
An online jobs board for those seeking to apply for a job as a travelling nurse. Many of the roles posted do ask for a year’s experience in a hospital setting. Working abroad

**GoinGlobal**
http://online.goinglobal.com/default.aspx
As a registered nurse you may want to use your skills abroad, either to work for a healthcare service in another country or to work in an international development or aid organisation. You’ll need to be on a King’s computer (or logged in to the King’s network) to register – but you can access it from any computer after. This is a great resource, with access to millions of jobs and internships, including nursing ones, around the world. It also has very detailed country guides, with a wealth of useful information on every aspect of job-hunting in specific countries – from CV templates for that country, to information on popular job sites, recruitment agency advice and lots more.