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Lpn practical nursing

3 min read • April, 28 2023 Nursing is a rewarding field with plenty of room for personal and professional growth. Choosing the right nursing career pathway starts your profession on the right foot. To become a licensed practical nurse (LPN), you must complete an LPN training program and pass a licensing test. Becoming an LPN involves less time and expense than becoming a registered nurse (RN). That makes it an excellent option if you're interested in becoming a nurse but want to start working as soon as possible. LPN-to-RN bridge programs can help you advance if you decide to complete a more intensive nurse training program later. What Is an LPN? A licensed practical nurse is a health care professional responsible for basic patient care and comfort. LPNs are essential to the patient experience and work closely with RNs and physicians. They monitor a patient's status, manage basic care, and keep up-to-date medical records. An LPN is often a patient's primary point of contact and can relay the patient's concerns to the rest of the care team. What Do LPNs Do? An LPN performs tasks such as taking vital signs, administering medication, placing catheters, dressing wounds, and carrying out health care instructions created by the RN, physician, and other care team members. An LPN typically works under an RN's direct supervision and assists patients in daily routines like eating, dressing, and bathing. The Difference Between an LPN and LVN Licensed practical nurses and licensed vocational nurses (LVNs) perform similar job functions and have the same education requirements. The main distinction is the title based on the state where they work. California and Texas use the term LVN while all other states refer to these entry-level nurses as LPNs. The Difference Between an LPN and RN RNs receive more training than LPNs and, as a result, have more responsibilities. A registered nurse works with physicians, advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), and a team of specialists to develop a patient care plan that the LPN helps to execute. LPN Schooling and Training Requirements Becoming a licensed practical nurse is a relatively quick way to start a nursing career. The general LPN requirements include the following: Earning a high school diploma or GED Completing a vocational training course Passing the National Council Licensure Examination for Practical Nurses (NCLEX-PN) Before beginning your studies or employment, you may need to pass a background check or basic skills test. LPN education covers theoretical training and various practical skills for nurses. The licensing exam ensures you have the skills and knowledge to work safely as a nurse. How Long Does It Take to Become an LPN? The process to become an LPN takes at least a year. An LPN training program through a community college or technical school typically runs for about twelve months. You'll then need to pass the NCLEX-PN, so thoroughly prepare for the exam and check for testing dates and locations in your area. If you don't pass the NCLEX-PN exam, don't worry, you'll be able to retake the test after 45 days. Images sourced from Getty Images As frontline caregivers, licensed practical nurses (LPNs) are an important part of any health care team. LPNs typically manage basic patient care; although in some facilities, they can get extra training so they can perform more advanced tasks. In two states, California and Texas, the title for this position is licensed vocational nurse (LVN). LPNs and LVNs have the same training and responsibilities As the U.S. population ages, the need for LPNs will continue to grow, especially if they specialize in areas such as geriatrics. Registered nurses (RNs) and LPNs work together in various settings, such as acute care hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, and community health. The scope of practice for LPNs can depend on where they work. Their duties tend to focus on hands-on patient care, such as: Assessing patients to monitor their progress, watching for any problems, and reporting them to the RN in charge Documenting their findings in the medical records Taking vital signs (blood pressure, temperature, respirations, and pulse) Changing wound dressings Giving medications Help patients with activities of daily living, such as feeding, dressing, and mobility Help patients get out of bed, walk, and become more mobile Performing CPR if needed In some facilities, LPNs are allowed to do more specialized tasks, such as starting IV lines and taking phone orders from a doctor. In some places, they might also have more advanced roles, such as managing nursing assistants and others and mentoring new staff. RNs supervise LPNs and delegate work to them. RNs might do some of the LPN tasks, such as giving medications and documenting in the medical records, but they also have other duties that LPNs are not licensed to do. Some include: Leading emergency responses, such as Basic Life Support and Advanced Cardiac Life Support Giving chemotherapy drugs and blood products Giving medications through central lines Developing patient care plans Assessing and managing patients, ensuring their needs are met Admitting and discharging patients RNs with advanced degrees can supervise other RNs, work in administration, or teach. Licensed practical nurses are qualified to handle many tasks that are necessary to keep patients comfortable while at the hospital or in other types of medical settings. LPNs handle tasks such as: Recording patients' vital signs, such as blood pressure, temperature, and pulse Reporting patient status to RNs and doctors and adding it to patient charts Changing wound dressings Giving medications Feeding and bathing patients Following health care plans developed by an RN or a doctor If you want to become an LPN, you must have a high school diploma or GED, which is a must to get into an LPN program. You can find LPN training programs at local community colleges and technical schools, and some area hospitals and high schools offer them as well. The programs usually take about 1 year to complete. While studying, you'll have a combination of classroom courses on biology, pharmacology, nursing, and other subjects, along with supervised clinical experience. This gives you the opportunity to do practical work in a hospital or health care facility and gain hands-on experience. You must get satisfactory marks in your clinical experience as well as your classroom work to successfully complete the program. To get your LPN license, you'll have to pass the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-PN) first. (Photo Credit: Maskot/Getty Images) At the end of your program, you must take the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-PN). The exam is offered throughout the year at various locations. Passing this exam grants you an LPN license and allows you to begin working in your field. If you don't pass the NCLEX-PN, you can take it again after 45 days. Many LPNs go on to further their education. LPNs may get specific certifications to work in certain fields, such as IV therapy or neonatal care. They may also get further nursing education to become an RN. Many colleges offer bridge programs, considering the experience the LPNs already have. LPNs can't diagnose any medical condition or prescribe any medication. However, they can handle most of the routine tasks of day-to-day medical care. Typically, they give medication and perform basic medical tasks such as changing bandages. In most cases, the LPN will not be the medical practitioner you are scheduled to see. Instead, they will be working as an assistant to the medical professional or doctor who has primary charge of your care. As a result, you may see an LPN in a variety of different medical facilities. As an important part of the health care team, LPNs can work in a variety of settings with many different types of patients. Nursing homes Most commonly, LPNs are found in long-term care facilities, such as nursing homes and hospice care facilities. These are where people need the most day-to-day assistance. Here, LPNs help residents care for themselves, give medications, and monitor their health, reporting any changes to the supervising RNs or the residents' primary care physicians, depending on the facilities' protocols. Home health care LPNs often involve having a nurse visit regularly. Typically, an RN/case manager assesses what type of nursing care the patients need and then an LPN is assigned. With home care, LPNs provide similar care to what they would in a nursing home or hospice center. They monitor their clients' health and help them handle daily tasks that they cannot manage on their own. General physician offices LPNs can be part of the care team in general physician offices. An LPN may be the person who takes vital signs and settles patients in the examination room before the doctor comes in. They might also do other tasks, such as applying dressings. General hospitals LPNs are most frequently in charge of responding to patient requests, giving medications, taking care of wound dressings, and helping patients feel comfortable. LPNs might also work in government offices, correctional facilities, psychiatric care units, or as travel nurses. LPN salaries in the U.S. vary between states, but in general, the median salary for LPNs in the U.S. is around \$59,000 per year or \$28 per hour. The state that pays the highest wages is Washington, at around \$70,000 per year or \$33 per hour. The next highest-paying state is California, while Mississippi pays the lowest — at around \$45,000 per year or \$21 per hour. Regardless of the state, LPN salaries also vary by the type of facility they work in. For example, jobs in nursing and residential care facilities usually pay the most. Government jobs also tend to pay well. Licensed practical nurses (LPNs) are an important part of the health care team, providing hands-on patient care. LPNs, called licensed vocational nurses (LVNs) in California and Texas, can work in many areas but are mostly found in skilled nursing facilities or hospice care facilities, as well as home care. LPNs are in demand all across the country. Many LPNs continue their education and study to become RNs. How can I become an LPN? To become an LPN, you must have a high school diploma or a GED. Once you have this, you can apply to attend an LPN program at a community or technical college. Some hospitals and high schools also offer LPN programs. After you successfully complete the program, which usually takes about a year, you write a licensing exam to be allowed to practice. What are the typical job responsibilities of an LPN? LPNs are frontline health care professionals who generally offer hands-on patient care. They can help patients with their daily care (dressing, feeding, and so on), give medications, change wound dressings, and more. What is the career outlook for a licensed practical nurse? The career outlook for LPNs is good. As people in the U.S. age and need more care, hospitals and other facilities will need LPNs to provide that care. Can LPNs make nursing diagnoses? Making a nursing diagnosis falls under the RNs' scope of work. LPNs can't make a nursing diagnosis. Should I become an LPN or RN? Everyone has different career goals and levels of access to education. Many RNs first train and work as LPNs. This allows them to save money for school and to see if they like being a nurse. If you know your goal is to offer hands-on patient care, then the LPN program might be right for you. If your goals are to be allowed to manage patient care, make nursing diagnoses, and do more administrative work such as supervising or teaching, then you might be better off going for your RN license. This page will help you understand what it takes to become an LPN, what LPNs do, where they work, and their earning potential. You'll also find that the LPN career is one step on a path to becoming a registered nurse, nurse practitioner, advance practice nurse, or a nurse leader. If you have a passion for helping people and are interested in a rewarding, challenging and exciting career in healthcare — a job as an LPN may be the right place to start. Licensed practical nurses (LPN) are sometimes called licensed vocational nurses (LVN), and they are in demand in the United States, along with many careers in healthcare. According to the BLS, employment of licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses (LPNs and LVNs) is projected to grow 9 percent from 2020 to 2030, much faster than the average for all occupations. LPNs or LVNs provide medical care to patients, under the supervision of senior nursing staff. The senior staff typically consists of RNs or nurses who hold advanced degrees, doctors, and other licensed healthcare professionals. As LPNs get more experience they may become supervisors and manage other LPNs or certified nursing assistants (CNAs). Obtain a high school diploma or an equivalent education. Complete a training program that prepares them to pass the National Council Licensure Examination for LPNs. Typically, the educational programs for LPNs take about one year to complete. In some states, you may need to pass a state-administered licensing test. Nurses who hold LPN certifications have attained either an associate's degree (16%), some college without a degree (38%), or a post-secondary certificate (35%), according to O*NET Online's summary report for Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses. The average LPN has likely studied at a community college or technical school and completed practical training to earn a certificate as a licensed practical nurse. If you're wondering whether an LPN certification is right for you, consider soft skills that may help licensed practical nurses in their day-to-day work. Soft skills are skills that can't necessarily be taught in a classroom, such as compassion, communication, and listening. According to the O*NET report for LPNs and LVNs, soft skills that may benefit LPNs include: Service orientation — LPNs are driven to serve their communities Active listening — LPNs are good at listening — and hearing — what other people say Speaking — LPNs are good communicators, whether they're talking to patients or doctors Time management — LPNs are good at prioritizing tasks and getting work done on time Critical thinking — LPNs must be able to use logic and reason to identify issues and solve problems Active learning — Healthcare providers must be eager and willing to continue their education throughout their careers The career outlook for LPNs, like most healthcare professions, is greater than the national average for all occupations. For many nurses, becoming an LPN is just the beginning of a career path in nursing. Some licensed practical nurses go on to earn other degrees to possibly advance their careers, such as an LPN to RN degree. LPNs play important roles in healthcare settings. They provide supportive care to other healthcare providers, whether it is clinical, administrative or a combination of both. LPNs are often "frontline" healthcare providers who have direct contact with patients. The specific tasks that LPNs perform include: Checking vitals signs such as blood pressure and pulse rates Administering basic care such as changing bandages Helping patients bathe, dress, eat and perform other self-care tasks Recording and reporting patient histories and concerns to registered nurses, doctors and other practitioners Collecting samples for laboratory tests Inserting catheters and IVs (in some states, with specialized training) Administering medication (in some states) under the supervision of an RN, nurse practitioner or doctor Cleaning and sterilizing medical equipment and instruments Performing clerical work in a healthcare setting Training and educating patients and their families or caregivers Preparing medical supplies and equipment for doctors and other healthcare practitioners to use to diagnose and treat patients Preparing patients for medical procedures Ordering medical equipment and supplies Assisting nurses and doctors during patient exams Your duties as an LPN will vary depending on the type of healthcare environment you work in. LPNs in hospitals may have very different roles from LPNs who work in private practice or home health agencies, which you'll learn in the next section. According to the BLS, most LPNs (38%) work in nursing and residential care facilities. Licensed practical nurses also work in hospitals (14%), physician offices (13%), home healthcare agencies (12%) and in government facilities (7%). Nursing and residential care facilities: Licensed practical nurses will have different duties according to the state they live in. Some states will require that LPNs start intravenous (IV) drips and give medications, while other states don't allow LPNs to perform these tasks. In some states, an experienced licensed practical nurse will supervise and lead a team of LVNs or LPNs. Hospitals: According to the BLS, hospitals hire a good portion of LPNs to assist their day-to-day work. Your title may be different, such as occupational health nurse, medical assistant or nursing assistant. Private practice: While most LPNs work in nursing homes and long-term care facilities, they also find rewarding careers in a variety of settings. If you earn certificates or training in a specialized field such as gerontology, pediatrics, dermatology or any number of medical specialties, you may have an easier time finding a job with a private practice. LPNs who work in physician offices perform a combination of healthcare and administrative roles. Home health agencies: LPNs who work for home health agencies travel to patients' homes to help with basic care such as administering medication, delivering supplies, changing wounds, and providing care to patients in their homes. Government: A small number of LPN jobs are through federal, state, and local government agencies, such as state-owned and operated hospitals and clinics. LPNs at these locations do similar jobs as they would at non-government hospitals, clinics and agencies. If you are fortunate enough to work for a government agency as an LPN, you'd likely earn a higher than average salary; the BLS reports LPNs in government average \$48,050 per year as of 2018. Licensed practical nurses are in demand in the U.S., according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The more experience you have as an LPN, the higher your earning potential may be. LPNs reported an average annual salary in 2020 of \$48,820 in the United States, according to O*NET's summary for LPNs and LVNs. Different skills can also influence how much licensed practical nurses make. LPNs in long-term care, geriatrics, wound care, home health and hospice may earn different wages than LPNs who work in pediatrics, surgery and family practices. While licensed practical nurses have less schooling than other nurses, they are still critical to the wellbeing of their patients. If you're eager to begin working in the medical field, this may be the right place for you to begin your career. Registered nurses (RN) provide direct care to patients, while licensed practical nurses (LPN) typically provide assistance to doctors or registered nurses. Licensure as a registered nurse is generally sought after graduation from a 4-year undergraduate nursing program and successful completion of the NCLEX-RN. Licensed practical nurses typically may need to complete a 12-14 month post-high school program and the NCLEX-PN. Licensure as a RN is generally a prerequisite both for graduate nursing programs and for advanced practice or specialty certification. This page includes information from O*NET OnLine by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (USDOL/ETA). Used under the CC BY 4.0 license. O*NET® is a trademark of USDOL/ETA. Information last updated January 2022. Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. 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