

RN Nursing Titles and Rankings You Need to Know

Nursing Aid and Nursing Assistant

While they may wear nursing scrubs and have the word “nursing” in their titles, nursing aids are not actually nurses.

LPN/LVN (They are not license RN’s)

Licensed Practical Nurses and Licensed Vocational Nurses are actually the same position. These nurses communicate the care plan to patients and their families and handle basic medical tasks such as taking blood pressure readings, changing bandages and inserting catheters.

Registered Nurse (RN)

Registered Nurses have an associate’s or bachelor’s degree in nursing and perform a variety of clinical and administrative tasks in many different settings. They assist physicians, record medical history, monitor patient symptoms, administer medicine, and perform diagnostic tasks and much more.

Staff Nurse or Bedside Nurse

Staff Nurses provide direct, hands-on patient care, often working at their bedsides in a hospital (hence the name). Staff Nurses may work in many different units and execute many different tasks, and some facilities give nurses the option of whether they would like to practice as a generalist or a specialist.

Charge Nurse or Shift Manager

A Charge Nurse manages a shift of Staff Nurses, in addition to performing the patient care duties of a Staff Nurse. Charge Nurses oversee administrative and managerial tasks such as coordinating the staffing schedule, covering call-ins; managing teams of Staff Nurses and making sure all policies are enforced. Most Charge Nurses are RNs, though in a few select cases they may be LPNs instead. They report to the Nurse Manager or Supervisor.

Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs)

The next level up from an RN, Advanced Practice Registered Nurses have earned their Master of Nursing Science (MSN). They can do everything an RN can, and take on greater responsibilities such as referring patients to specialists and ordering or evaluating test results. Like RNs, APRNs may manage a team of people and/or work in specialized settings. There are four main types of APRNs—nurse anesthetists, nurse midwives, certified nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists—and some MSN degree programs even offer concentrations in each of these paths.

Nurse Anesthetist

Certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNAs) work to ensure the safe and effective administration of anesthesia during a variety of medical procedures. They may work in hospitals, dental practices and other environments that require the use of anesthesia.

Nurse Practitioner

According to the American Association for Nurse Practitioners, Certified Nurse Practitioners (CNPs) are “clinicians that blend clinical expertise in diagnosing and treating health conditions with an added emphasis on disease prevention and health management.” CNPs may diagnose and treat conditions, prescribe medications, order and interpret diagnostic tests and much more.

Clinical Nurse Specialist

Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNS) are certified in a specialty of their choice. Specialties may take many forms, including population (pediatrics, geriatrics, women's health), setting (critical care, emergency room), disease or medical subspecialty (diabetes, oncology), type of care (psychiatric, rehabilitation) and type of health problem (pain, wounds, stress).

Nurse Midwife

Certified nurse midwives (CNMs) combine their RN with specialized training in pregnancy, labor and postpartum concerns. They may help provide reproductive healthcare services, counsel expectant mothers pre-birth, deliver babies, perform exams both before and after childbirth, assist with breastfeeding training and educate new parents on caring for infants.

Family Nurse Practitioner

Family Nurse Practitioners (FNPs) trained to work with both adults and children within the context of a family practice. They work with patients to maintain good health and prevent problems over the long-term. Depending on the state, FNPs may work under the supervision of a physician or they allowed practicing independently.

Travel Nurse

Travel nurses take on temporary assignments in different locations, either domestically or internationally. They perform many of the tasks that typical RNs do, and employed by an agency who helps facilities manage their staffing.

Nurse Care Manager

Nurse Case Managers research, plan and schedule long-term patient care plans, usually with the ultimate goal of prevention (or at least keeping patients out of the hospital).

Intensive Care Unit Registered Nurse

Intensive Care Unit Registered Nurses work in the intensive care units (ICUs) of hospitals, caring for patients with serious injuries or illnesses. ICU nurses may treat patients of all ages and conditions, or choose to work in specialty hospitals or units (i.e., the pediatric ICU). Because of the complexity and severity of the cases, most facilities require additional training before nurses can work in the ICU.

Neonatal Intensive Care Registered Nurse

Even more specific than an Intensive Care Unit Registered Nurse is the Neonatal Intensive Care Registered Nurse. These nurses work with infants who are premature or critically ill and thus kept in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). They monitor the babies and their life-saving technology and comfort them when they can.

Emergency Room Registered Nurse

Nurses who excel at staying calm and mastering chaos often thrive in the emergency room (ER), where you never know what case might walk through the door. ER nurses help patients experiencing serious illnesses and injuries, many of them acute. Since no two shifts are ever the same, ER nurses must be adept at stabilizing patients and treating a variety of conditions.

Operating Room Nurse

Sometimes called perioperative nurses, Operating Room (OR) nurses care for patients before, during and after surgery. They also serve as a bridge between the surgical team and patients and their families. OR nurses work with patients and their families to make sure they have everything they need to ensure a fast recovery.

Post-Anesthesia Care Unit Registered Nurse

Post-Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU) Nurses focus specifically on helping patients recover from anesthesia post-procedure. Also referred to as peri-anesthesia nurses, they are trained to handle patients who wake up confused or in pain or otherwise react adversely to the anesthesia. PACU nurses comfort patients as they wake up and offer tips for recovery.

Medical-Surgical Registered Nurse

The largest nursing specialty in the United States, Med-Surgical Nurses treat adult patients with a wide range of injuries and illnesses. While this originally considered an entry-level position for nurses looking for training, over time, medical-surgical has become its own specialization since it requires nurses to be well educated on so many diseases and injuries. **Oncology Registered Nurse**

Oncology nurses care for patients who have cancer or who are at risk for developing it. They monitor the patient's condition and administer treatments such as chemotherapy. Nurses support the patient and their loved ones through the difficult diagnosis and treatment process. Oncology is a challenging but rewarding specialty, given the long-term nature of cancer and its treatment.

Dialysis Registered Nurse

In addition, called nephrology nurses, dialysis RNs administer dialysis treatment to patients with kidney disease or other conditions. They can work out of a variety of facilities, including hospitals, dialysis clinics, patients' homes and transplant units. In addition to performing the dialysis treatments themselves, nephrology nurses also implement other treatment plans.

Home Care Registered Nurse

As the name indicates, Home Care Nurses work out of patients' residences instead of hospitals. They often work with elderly adults or young children or people with developmental or mobility issues. These nurses pack up their nursing bags to visit patients in their homes as well as other residences such as senior living centers.

Finally, let us recap the nursing hierarchy from bottom to top:

Nursing aids, LPNs, Staff Nurses, Charge Nurses, Nursing Managers, Directors of Nursing and finally the Chief Nursing Officer. Nurses may go by many different titles depending on their specialty (or lack thereof). Refer back to this list whenever you need a quick refresher on the many nursing titles and rankings out there.