



Department of Health Science Careers in Health Care Management

Nature of the Work

Health care is a business and like every other business, it needs good management to keep it running smoothly, especially during times of change. The term "health services manager" encompasses individuals who plan, direct, coordinate, and supervise the delivery of health care. Health services managers include generalists and specialists. Generalists manage or help to manage an entire facility or system, while specialists are in charge of specific clinical departments or services.

Large facilities usually have several assistant administrators to aid the top administrator and to handle daily decisions. They may direct activities in clinical areas such as nursing, surgery, therapy, medical records or health information; or in non-health areas such as finance, housekeeping, human resources, and information management.

In smaller facilities, top administrators handle more of the details of daily operations. For example, many nursing home administrators manage personnel, finance, facility operations, and admissions, and have a larger role in resident care.

In medical group practices, managers work closely with physicians. Whereas an office manager may handle business affairs in small medical groups, leaving policy decisions to the physicians themselves, larger groups usually employ a full-time administrator to advise on business strategies and coordinate day-to-day business.

Health services managers in health maintenance organizations (HMOs) and other managed care settings perform functions similar to those in large group practices, except their staffs may be larger. In addition, they may do more work in the areas of community outreach and preventive care than managers of a group practice.

Employment

Health services managers held about 222,000 jobs in 1998. Almost one-half of all jobs were in hospitals. About 1 in 4 were in nursing and personal care facilities or offices and clinics of physicians. The remainder worked mostly in home health agencies, ambulatory facilities run by state and local governments, offices of dentists and other health practitioners, medical and dental laboratories, residential care facilities, and other social service agencies.

Training and Other Qualifications

Health services managers must be familiar with management principles and practices. A bachelor's degree is the entry level degree for positions in smaller facilities and for some positions at the departmental level within health care organizations. A master's degree in health services administration, long-term care administration, health sciences, public health, public administration, or business administration is often pursued by managers after completion of the bachelor's and some work experience.

Graduates with bachelor's degrees in health administration usually begin as administrative assistants or assistant department heads in larger hospitals, or as department heads or assistant administrators in small hospitals or nursing homes.

Health services managers are often responsible for millions of dollars of facilities and equipment and hundreds of employees. To make effective decisions, they need to be open to different opinions and good at analyzing contradictory information. They must understand finance and information systems, and be able to interpret data. Motivating others to implement their decisions requires strong leadership abilities. Tact, diplomacy, flexibility, and communication skills are essential because health services managers spend most of their time interacting with others.

Job Outlook

Employment of health services managers is **expected to grow faster than the average** for all occupations through 2008 as health services continue to expand and diversify. Hospitals will continue to employ the most managers. However, opportunities will be especially good in home health care, long-term care, and nontraditional health organizations, such as managed care operations and consulting firms. Many services previously provided in hospitals will be shifted to these sectors, especially as medical technologies improve. Demand in medical group practice management will grow as medical group practices become larger and more complex.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of medical and health service managers were \$48,870 in 1998. The middle 50 percent earned between \$37,900 and \$71,580 a year. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$28,600 and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$88,730 a year and up to \$125,000 per year.