

## INSIDER INFORMATION

### *Health Services*

The following information has been gathered by workforce professionals who maintain close relationships with health care organizations in the Gulf Coast Area. Use these insider “tips” to help customers more effectively search for occupations in the health services industry.

#### **Opportunities for Nurses—RNs and LVNs**

Employment opportunities are good for all nurses. However, there are details you should be aware of when counseling nurses—or those wanting to pursue a nursing career. First, be sure to understand the difference between an LVN (Licensed Vocational Nurse) and an RN (Registered Nurse). Both LVNs and RNs are licensed by the Texas Board of Nursing. A practicing LVN has a narrower scope of practice than an RN. An LVN may not work independently and must be under the supervision of another health professional such as an RN, physician, nurse practitioner, physician’s assistant, dentist or podiatrist. An LVN education program is generally one year to 18 months and qualifies the graduate to take the State licensing exam for LVN.

There are many job opportunities for LVNs and often these are in nursing homes, offices of dentists, physicians or podiatrists, community clinics, community hospitals, and long-term acute hospitals. Large complex hospitals, such as those in the Texas Medical Center, often have limited employment opportunities for LVNs.

RNs are allowed to practice independently within the scope of nursing. RN education programs usually are offered at community colleges, universities and health-related institutions (e.g. health science centers). There are two types of degree programs that prepare a student to become an RN: Community college programs offer associate degrees in nursing—called ADN-- and universities and health-related institutions offer bachelor’s degrees in nursing—called BSN. Both programs prepare graduates to take the State RN license exam. Although the RN license for each type of program is the same, some large complex hospitals prefer to hire RNs with a BSN degree

Remember that hiring practices change, especially when there is a shortage of nurses. The bottom line is to check if a potential employer has employment opportunities for LVNs, ADN RNs and/or BSN RNs before referring a customer.

#### **CNAs**

Job titles for CNAs vary in hospitals and include titles such as patient care assistants, nursing assistants, nurses’ aide, nursing technicians, etc. Some hospitals hire only patient care assistants with experience while others offer on-the-job training. In many hospitals, CNA certification is not necessary, especially if one has experience, but the starting salary may be slightly higher if one is certified. All employers look for individuals who demonstrate interest in health care or human services, have a strong work ethic, a good attitude, and are willing to stay at the place of employment. Recently, some large hospitals contracted with community colleges to provide their patient care assistant training and orientation. This out-sourced training may or may not lead to certification.

In most nursing homes, CNA certification is required. Very few nursing homes have extensive training and orientation. Some nursing home employers are willing to allow employees a limited period of time to become certified after employment. Most hospitals and some nursing homes offer tuition reimbursement or scholarships for continued education that is job-related, and training to become a certified nursing assistant may be included in this benefit. Check with the employer’s Human Resources Department.

In nursing homes and in hospitals, pre-employment background checks and drug screens are common practice. It is important for the applicant to disclose any criminal history in his/her application. Depending on the situation, it may or may not interfere with getting a job, but lying on an application almost always results in the candidate being disqualified.

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#### LVN and RN Educational Programs

LVN education programs are technical and vocational programs, and graduates do NOT receive an academic degree. LVN education programs are offered in community colleges, private academic schools and career/technical schools. To be eligible to sit for the LVN licensure examination, one must have completed a program approved by the Texas Board of Nursing.

RN educational programs are professional academic programs that result in the graduate receiving an academic degree—either an Associate of Science degree in Nursing (ADN) or a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree (BSN).

To be eligible to sit for either the LVN or RN licensure examination, a student must be a graduate of a program approved by the Texas Board of Nursing. These are listed on the web site: <http://www.bon.state.tx.us/nursingeducation/info.html>. Due to the limited capacity in approved schools of nursing, there are many fraudulent schools and technical institutes “popping” up around the state. Counsel customers to be very careful NOT to pay any money to a school until they are certain that the program is approved by the Texas Board of Nursing!

LVN programs are usually 12 to 18 months long. RN programs at community colleges usually take about three or four years to complete including the pre-requisites. Upon graduation, students are awarded an associate degree in nursing. In community colleges, students often need about one year or less to complete the pre-requisites and then two to three years to successfully complete the nursing courses. RN programs resulting in a BSN degree usually take four to five years to complete. The first two years are general studies and pre-requisites and the last two years are nursing courses. Many students take classes in all three semesters—Fall, Spring and Summer.

#### Nursing Education Programs

##### ● LVN Programs in the Gulf Coast Region

The following LVN programs have been approved by the Texas Board of Nursing. These may change from time to time so check the web site noted earlier.

- Alvin Community College, Alvin TX
- American Medical Institute, Houston, TX
- Brazosport College, Lake Jackson, TX
- College of the Mainland, Texas City, TX
- Galveston College, Galveston, TX
- Houston Community College System, Houston, TX
- Joe G. Davis School of Vocational Nursing, Huntsville, TX
- Lee College, Baytown, TX
- Lone Star College- Cy-Fair, Cypress, TX
- Lone Star College-Kingwood, Kingwood, TX.
- Lone Star College- Montgomery, Conroe, TX
- Lone Star College—North Harris, Houston, TX
- Lone Star College- Tomball, Tomball, TX
- San Jacinto College North, Houston, TX
- San Jacinto College, South, Houston, TX
- Wharton County Junior College, Wharton, TX

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#### ● RN Programs in the Gulf Coast Region

The following RN programs have been approved by the Texas Board of Nursing. These may change from time to time so check the web site noted earlier.

##### **Associate Degree in Nursing**

- Alvin Community College, Alvin, TX
- College of the Mainland, Texas City, Texas
- Galveston College, Galveston, TX
- Houston Community College System, Houston, TX
- Lee College, Baytown, TX
- Lone Star College- Cy-Fair, Cypress, TX
- Lone Star College-Kingwood, Kingwood, TX
- Lone Star College- Montgomery, Conroe, TX
- Lone Star College- North Harris, Houston, TX
- Lone Star College- Tomball, Tomball, TX
- San Jacinto College Central, Pasadena, TX
- San Jacinto College South, Houston, TX (LVN to ADN Only)
- Wharton County Junior College, Wharton, TX

##### **Baccalaureate Degree in Nursing**

- Houston Baptist University, Houston, TX
- Texas Woman’s University-Houston Campus, Houston, TX
- Prairie View A & M University, Houston, TX
- University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, Houston, TX
- University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, Galveston, TX

Admission to nursing programs is very competitive. Currently, there is not enough capacity in the educational system to meet the demand for nursing programs because of a shortage of qualified nurse faculty.

Consequently, many qualified applicants are not accepted. Students intending to become nurses should take science (especially biology and chemistry), math and any available career classes related to health. Check the web site of a nursing program to find out its specific pre-requisite courses

Community colleges, universities and health-related institutions offer many creative opportunities to help interested students get into nursing. Most community colleges offer LVN to RN bridge programs which usually are twelve-month programs that offer LVNs and/or paramedics the opportunity to earn an associate degree in nursing and be eligible to take the RN licensure exam. Most BSN programs also offer ADN to BSN accelerated bridge programs. Almost all institutions—universities, community colleges and health-related institutions—offer fast-track programs to persons with degrees in fields other than nursing to earn a degree in nursing in a shorter period of time than provided in the normal curriculum. Some of these programs are online. Check the institution’s web site for more information.

**WARNING:** Before enrolling in any program of nursing including online programs, private schools, career institutes or public institutions, make certain the nursing program is approved by the Texas Board of Nursing. One of the eligibility requirements for either an LVN or RN licensure exam is that the person is a graduate of an approved nurse education program. Because there is limited capacity in approved schools, many fraudulent programs are exploiting applicants. For more information, go to <http://www.bon.state.tx.us/nursingeducation>.

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#### Tuition Assistance

Many hospitals have tuition assistance and scholarship programs. For example, one local hospital recently provided training to raise all nurses to RN status. For hospital-sponsored programs such as these, there usually is a requirement that the person be employed for a minimum amount of time to be eligible. Then he/she must work a certain amount of time after participation to be exempt from paying back the loan or scholarship. To find out details, contact the Human Resources department of the employer OR look at their web site.

In addition, many foundations, associations and governmental organizations offer scholarships and loans. A focused internet search is an easy way to find information or talk to the financial counselor at the school.

#### Wages

The highest paying positions usually are in hospitals. For example, CNAs in hospitals typically earn about \$10/hour. Those same positions in nursing homes typically earn minimum wage to \$8/hour.

Information on entry and average hourly wages by occupation is collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics through the Occupation Employment Survey. The survey is done every two years, and the next update is in July 2008. Below are listed the entry and average hourly wages in the Gulf Coast region for CNAs, LVNs and RNs.

Job	Entry Hourly Wage	Average Hourly Wage
CNA	\$7.80	\$10.14
LVN	\$14.98	\$18.42
RN	\$22.84	\$29.85

#### High-Skill, High-Growth Occupations Supported by Workforce Solutions Scholarships

Workforce Solutions has scholarships for eligible customers that will support certain high-skill, high-growth occupations (see [www.wrksolutions.org/jobs/occupationsindemand](http://www.wrksolutions.org/jobs/occupationsindemand)). This list is re-evaluated every two years and was changed most recently in December 2007. Health care occupations on the list include the following:

- Registered Nurses - RNs
- Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurses - LPN/LVN
- Nursing Instructors and teachers - post secondary
- Respiratory Therapists
- Medical and Clinical Laboratory Technicians
- Radiology Technologists and Technicians

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#### **Other Areas of Demand Not Supported by Workforce Solutions Scholarships**

- Physical Therapists
- Physical Therapy Assistants (PTA)
- Occupational Therapist
- Occupational Therapy Assistants (OTA)
- Speech Language Pathologists
- Speech Language Assistants
- Pharmacists
- Pharmacy Technicians
- Medical Records/Health Information Specialist (translates patient records to billing codes)
- Medical Transcriptionist (most employers are third parties that contract with a hospital)

#### **Personal Qualities/Educational Requirements**

Hospitals and other health care organizations typically look for entry-level people who are people-oriented, able to work in a team, have a strong work ethic, good attitude, and demonstrate strong interest/ability in mathematics and science. The ability to solve problems and take action (find needed resources, for example) is also important.

Nursing programs (community colleges and universities) look for candidates with high GPAs in high school, demonstrated strength in science and mathematics, maturity/seriousness, a demonstrated work ethic, critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, and willingness to take action. It also is helpful to have some experience in health care or have participated in health education programs at the high-school level.

It is important to remind customers to make full disclosure about criminal records—including DUIs-- when interviewing. Background checks and drug screening are usual components of the hiring process, and if there are differences between what the customer disclosed and what is found in the background check, it will be considered negatively and may disqualify the applicant.