

### Working Conditions

Pharmacy aides work in clean, organized, well-lighted, and well-ventilated areas. Most of their workday is spent on their feet. They may be required to lift heavy boxes or to use stepladders to retrieve supplies from high shelves.

Aides work the same hours as pharmacists. This includes evenings, nights, weekends, and some holidays. Because some hospital and retail pharmacies are open 24 hours a day, aides may work varying shifts. There are many opportunities for part-time work in both retail and hospital settings.

### Employment

Pharmacy aides held about 57,000 jobs in 2000. Over 80 percent were in retail pharmacies, either independently owned or part of a drug store chain, grocery store, department store, or mass retailer. The vast majority of these are in drug stores. Thirteen percent were in hospitals, and the rest were in mail-order pharmacies, clinics, pharmaceutical wholesalers, and the Federal Government.

### Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Most pharmacy aides receive informal on-the-job training, but employers favor those with at least a high school diploma. Prospective pharmacy aides with experience working as a cashier may have an advantage. Employers also prefer applicants with strong customer service and communication skills and experience managing inventories and using a computer. Aides entering the field need strong spelling, reading, and mathematics skills.

Successful pharmacy aides are organized, dedicated, friendly, and responsible. They should be willing and able to take directions. Candidates interested in becoming pharmacy aides cannot have prior records of drug or substance abuse. Strong interpersonal and communication skills are needed because there is a lot of interaction with patients, coworkers, and healthcare professionals. Teamwork is very important because aides are often required to work with technicians and pharmacists.

Pharmacy aides almost always are trained on the job. They may begin by observing a more experienced worker. After they become familiar with the store's equipment, policies, and procedures, they begin to work on their own. Once they become experienced workers, they are not likely to receive additional training, except when new equipment is introduced or when policies or procedures change.

To become a pharmacy aide, one should be able to perform repetitive work accurately. Aides need good basic mathematics skills and good manual dexterity. Because they deal constantly with the public, pharmacy aides should be neat in appearance and able to deal pleasantly and tactfully with customers. Some employers may prefer people with experience typing, handling money, or operating specialized equipment, including computers.

Advancement usually is limited, although some aides may decide to become a pharmacy technician or to enroll in pharmacy school to become a pharmacist.

### Job Outlook

Job opportunities for full- and part-time work are expected to be good, especially for aides with related work experience. Job openings will be created by employment growth and by the need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force.

Employment of pharmacy aides is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2010 due to the increased pharmaceutical needs of a larger and older population and to the greater use of medication. The increased number of middle-aged and elderly people—who, on average, use more prescription drugs than do younger people—will spur demand for aides in all practice settings.

Cost-conscious insurers, pharmacies, and health systems will continue to emphasize the role of aides. As a result, pharmacy aides will assume responsibility for more routine tasks previously performed by pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, thereby giving pharmacists more time to interact with patients and affording technicians more time to prepare medications.

### Earnings

Median hourly earnings of pharmacy aides were \$8.52 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$7.16 and \$10.58; the lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.12, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$13.14. Median hourly earnings of pharmacy aides were \$8.02 in drug stores and proprietary stores, \$11.17 in hospitals, and \$8.47 in grocery stores in 2000.

### Related occupations

The work of pharmacy aides is closely related to that of pharmacy technicians. Workers in other medical support occupations include dental assistants, licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses, medical transcriptionists, medical records and health information technicians, occupational therapist assistants and aides, physical therapist assistants and aides, and surgical technologists.

### Sources of Additional Information

For information on employment opportunities, contact local employers or local offices of the State employment service.

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## Physical Therapist Assistants and Aides

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### Significant Points

- Employment is projected to increase much faster than the average, as rapid growth in the number of middle-aged and elderly individuals increases the demand for therapeutic services.
- Licensed physical therapist assistants have an associate's degree, but physical therapist aides usually learn skills on the job.
- More than two-thirds of jobs for physical therapist assistants and aides were in hospitals or offices of physical therapists.

### Nature of the Work

Physical therapist assistants and aides perform components of physical therapy procedures and related tasks selected by a supervising physical therapist. These workers assist physical therapists in providing services that help improve mobility, relieve pain, and prevent or limit permanent physical disabilities of patients suffering from injuries or disease. Patients include accident victims and individuals with disabling conditions, such as low back pain, arthritis, heart disease, fractures, head injuries, and cerebral palsy.

*Physical therapist assistants* perform a variety of tasks. Components of treatment procedures performed by these workers, under the direction and supervision of physical therapists, involve exercises, massages, electrical stimulation, paraffin baths, hot and cold packs, traction, and ultrasound. Physical therapist assistants record the patient's responses to treatment and report to the physical therapist the outcome of each treatment.



*Physical therapist assistants help patients with stretching exercises during treatment.*

*Physical therapist aides* help make therapy sessions productive, under the direct supervision of a physical therapist or physical therapist assistant. They usually are responsible for keeping the treatment area clean and organized and preparing for each patient's therapy. When patients need assistance moving to or from a treatment area, aides push them in a wheelchair, or provide them with a shoulder to lean on. Because they are not licensed, aides do not perform the clinical tasks of a physical therapist assistant.

The duties of aides include some clerical tasks, such as ordering depleted supplies, answering the phone, and filling out insurance forms and other paperwork. The extent to which an aide or an assistant performs clerical tasks depends on the size and location of the facility.

### **Working Conditions**

The hours and days that physical therapist assistants and aides work vary, depending on the facility and on whether they are full or part-time employees. Many outpatient physical therapy offices and clinics have evening and weekend hours, to help coincide with patients' personal schedules.

Physical therapist assistants and aides need to have a moderate degree of strength, due to the physical exertion required in assisting patients with their treatment. For example, in some cases, assistants and aides need to help lift patients. Additionally, constant kneeling, stooping, and standing for long periods are all part of the job.

### **Employment**

Physical therapist assistants and aides held 80,000 jobs in 2000. Physical therapist assistants held about 44,000 jobs; and physical therapist aides held about 36,000. They work alongside physical therapists in a variety of settings. More than two-thirds of jobs for assistants and aides were in hospitals or offices of physical therapists. Others work in nursing and personal care facilities, outpatient rehabilitation centers, offices and clinics of physicians, and home health agencies.

### **Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement**

Physical therapist aides are trained on the job, but physical therapist assistants typically earn an associate's degree from an accredited physical therapist assistant program. Licensure or registration is not required in all States for the physical therapist assistant to practice. The States that require licensure stipulate specific educational and examination criteria. Complete information on practice acts and regulations can be obtained from the State licensing boards. Additional requirements may include certification in CPR and other first aid and a minimum number of hours of clinical experience.

According to the American Physical Therapy Association, there were 268 accredited physical therapist assistant programs in the United States as of 2001. Accredited physical therapist assistant programs are designed to last 2 years, or 4 semesters, and culminate in an associate's degree. Programs are divided into academic study and hands on clinical experience. Academic coursework includes algebra, anatomy and physiology, biology, chemistry, and psychology. Before students begin their clinical field experience, many programs require that they complete a semester of anatomy and physiology and have certifications in CPR and other first aid. Both educators and prospective employers view clinical experience as an integral part of ensuring that students understand the responsibilities of a physical therapist assistant.

Employers typically require physical therapist aides to have a high school diploma, strong interpersonal skills, and a desire to assist people in need. Most employers provide clinical on-the-job training.

### **Job Outlook**

Employment of physical therapist assistants and aides is expected to grow much faster than the average through the year 2010. Federal legislation imposing limits on reimbursement for therapy services may adversely affect the job market for physical therapist assistants and aides in the near term. However, over the long run, demand for physical therapist assistants and aides will continue to rise, with growth in the number of individuals with disabilities or limited function. The rapidly growing elderly population is particularly vulnerable to chronic and debilitating conditions that require therapeutic services. These patients often need additional assistance in their treatment, making the roles of assistants and aides vital. The large baby-boom generation is entering the prime age for heart attacks and strokes, further increasing the demand for cardiac and physical rehabilitation. Additionally, future medical developments should permit an increased percentage of trauma victims to survive, creating added demand for therapy services.

Licensed physical therapist assistants can enhance the cost-effective provision of physical therapy services. Once a patient is evaluated, and a treatment plan is designed by the physical therapist, the physical therapist assistant can provide many aspects of treatment, as prescribed by the therapist.

### **Earnings**

Median annual earnings of physical therapist assistants were \$33,870 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$28,830 and \$40,440. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$23,150, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$45,610. Median annual earnings of physical therapist assistants in 2000 were \$33,660 in offices of other healthcare practitioners and \$33,820 in hospitals.

Median annual earnings of physical therapist aides were \$19,670 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$16,460 and \$23,390. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$14,590, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$28,800. Median annual earnings of physical therapist aides in 2000 were \$18,320 in offices of other healthcare practitioners and \$19,840 in hospitals.

### Related Occupations

Physical therapist assistants and aides work under the supervision of physical therapists. Other occupations in the healthcare field that work under the supervision of professionals include dental assistants, medical assistants, occupational therapist assistants and aides, and pharmacy technicians.

### Sources of Additional Information

Information on a career as a physical therapist assistant and a list of schools offering accredited programs can be obtained from:

- The American Physical Therapy Association, 1111 North Fairfax St., Alexandria, VA 22314-1488. Internet: <http://www.apta.org>

## Personal Care and Service Occupations

### Animal Care and Service Workers

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#### Significant Points

- Animal lovers get satisfaction in this occupation, but aspects of the work can be unpleasant and physically and emotionally demanding.
- Most animal care and service workers are trained on the job, but advancement depends on experience, formal training, and continuing education.

#### Nature of the Work

Many people like animals. But, as pet owners can attest, taking care of them is hard work. Animal care and service workers—which include animal caretakers and animal trainers—train, feed, water, groom, bathe, and exercise animals, and clean, disinfect, and repair their cages. They also play with the animals, provide companionship, and observe behavioral changes that could indicate illness or injury. Boarding kennels, animal shelters, veterinary hospitals and clinics, stables, laboratories, aquariums, and zoological parks all house animals and employ animal care and service workers. Job titles and duties vary by employment setting.

*kennel attendants* usually care for small companion animals like dogs and cats while their owners are working or traveling out of town. Beginning attendants perform basic tasks, such as cleaning cages and dog runs, filling food and water dishes, and exercising animals. Experienced attendants may provide basic animal healthcare, as well as bathe animals, trim nails, and attend to other grooming needs. Attendants who work in kennels also may sell pet food and supplies, assist in obedience training, help with breeding, or prepare animals for shipping.

Animal caretakers who specialize in grooming, or maintaining a pet's—usually a dog's or cat's—appearance are called  *groomers*. Some groomers work in kennels, veterinary clinics, animal shelters, or pet-supply stores. Others operate their own grooming business. Groomers answer telephones, schedule appointments, discuss with clients their pets' grooming needs, and collect information on the pet's disposition and its veterinarian. Groomers often are the first to notice a medical problem, such as an ear or skin infection, that requires veterinary care.

Grooming the pet involves several steps: An initial brush-out is followed by a first clipping of hair or fur using electric clippers, combs, and grooming shears; the groomer then cuts the nails, cleans the ears, bathes, and blow-dries the animal, and ends with a final clipping and styling.

Animal caretakers in animal shelters perform a variety of duties and work with a wide variety of animals. In addition to attending to the basic needs of the animals, caretakers also must keep records of

the animals received and discharged and any tests or treatments done. Some vaccinate newly admitted animals under the direction of a veterinarian or veterinary technician, and euthanize (painlessly put to death) seriously ill, severely injured, or unwanted animals. Animal caretakers in animal shelters also interact with the public, answering telephone inquiries, screening applicants for animal adoption, or educating visitors on neutering and other animal health issues.

Caretakers in stables are called  *groomers*. They saddle and unsaddle horses, give them rubdowns, and walk them to cool-off after a ride. They also feed, groom, and exercise the horses; clean out stalls and replenish bedding; polish saddles; clean and organize the tack (harness, saddle, and bridle) room; and store supplies and feed. Experienced groomers may help train horses.

In zoos, animal care and service workers, called  *keepers*, prepare the diets and clean the enclosures of animals, and sometimes assist in raising them when they are very young. They watch for any signs of illness or injury, monitor eating patterns or any changes in behavior, and record their observations. Keepers also may answer questions and ensure that the visiting public behaves responsibly toward the exhibited animals. Depending on the zoo, keepers may be assigned to work with a broad group of animals such as mammals, birds, or reptiles, or they may work with a limited collection of animals such as primates, large cats, or small mammals.

*Animal trainers* train animals for riding, security, performance, obedience, or assisting persons with disabilities. Animal trainers do this by accustoming the animal to human voice and contact, and conditioning the animal to respond to commands. Trainers use several techniques to help them train animals. One technique, known as a bridge, is a stimulus that a trainer uses to communicate the precise moment an animal does something correctly. When the



Animals have to be fed every day, so animal care and service workers often work weekend and holiday shifts.