What Do Rehabilitation Nurses Do?

Rehabilitation nurses help individuals affected by chronic illness or physical disability to achieve their greatest potential, adapt to their disabilities, and work toward productive, independent lives. They take a holistic approach to meeting patients’ medical, vocational, educational, environmental, and spiritual needs.

Rehabilitation nurses begin to work with individuals and their families soon after the onset of a disabling injury or chronic illness. They continue to provide support in the form of patient and family education and empower these individuals when they go home or return to work or school. The rehabilitation nurse often teaches patients and their caregivers how to access systems and resources.

Rehabilitation nursing is a philosophy of care, not a work setting or a phase of treatment. Rehabilitation nurses base their practice on rehabilitative and restorative principles by

- managing complex medical issues
- collaborating with other specialists
- providing ongoing patient/caregiver education
- setting goals for maximal independence
- establishing plans of care to maintain optimal wellness.

Rehabilitation Nurses Practice in All Settings

- Freestanding rehabilitation facilities
- Hospitals (inpatient rehabilitation units)
- Long-term subacute care facilities/skilled nursing facilities
- Long-term acute care facilities
- Comprehensive outpatient rehabilitation facilities
- Private practice
- Home healthcare agencies
- Clinics and day rehabilitation programs
- Community and government agencies
- Insurance companies and health maintenance organizations
- Schools and universities
Rehabilitation Nurses Fill Many Roles Across the Continuum of Care

• Administrator
• Admissions liaison
• Case manager
• Clinical nurse specialist
• Researcher
• Staff nurse
• Educator

Credentials

Rehabilitation nurses are registered nurses, licensed in the state where they practice. Some have master’s and doctoral degrees from one of several specialized programs across the country.

A registered nurse with at least 2 years of practice in rehabilitation nursing can earn distinction as a Certified Rehabilitation Registered Nurse (CRRN®) by successfully completing an examination that validates expertise.

Why Hire a Rehabilitation Nurse?

Rehabilitation nursing and rehabilitation/restoration principles are more important to the healthcare system than ever before. The rehabilitation nursing specialty has measurable, functional outcome goals for patients, which rehabilitation nurses use in planning and evaluating the effectiveness of patient care.

Rehabilitation nurses have excellent functional assessment skills and take a comprehensive approach to care. They act as multisystem integrators and team leaders, working with physicians, therapists, and others to solve problems and promote patients’ maximal independence. Rehabilitation nurses are particularly skilled at working with others to adapt ongoing care to the resources available.

Rehabilitation nurses act not only as caregivers but also as coordinators, collaborators, counselors, and case managers.

The Association of Rehabilitation Nurses’ Special Interest Groups have developed role descriptions to educate employers, patients, and others about the various roles of rehabilitation nurses and the skills they bring to all settings across the continuum of care. Role descriptions are available on the ARN Web site, www.rehabnurse.org, or by calling 800/229-7530.
The Association of Rehabilitation Nurses (ARN) is the membership organization for professional nurses actively engaged in or concerned with the practice of rehabilitation nursing. ARN works to advance rehabilitation nursing practice through education, advocacy, collaboration, and research to enhance the quality of life for those affected by physical disability or chronic illness.

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