

Report on role and career opportunities - health care assistant

[Health & Medicine](#), [Healthcare](#)



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Report: Role and Career Opportunities - Health Care Assistant

Summary

This report examines the roles, responsibilities and career opportunities for those seeking to be employed as a Health Care Assistant (HCA), for those living in Ireland.

The report first sets out a typical job description, which provides information about the HCA's role and responsibilities, as well as general requirements in terms of experience and academic requirements. The same source also provides data regarding pay rates and details of typical levels of experience plus the preponderance of females fulfilling this role.

The next part of the report summarizes feedback from a working HCA, who describes her daily routine, her tasks and responsibilities, the challenges of her job and the skills she brings to the job. The report also looks at the differences (if any) regarding roles and working as an HCA in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

The Research

- Health Care Assistant Job Description

Health Care Assistants (HCAs) generally work as part of a team including doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals – generally in a hospital or elderly care facility – although their main duties are likely to be directly involved with the patients. The daily tasks of an HCA are likely to be many and varied including bed-making, feeding, bathing and dressing the patients, checking their vital signs, maintaining stocks of clinical and other items.

Career-minded HCAs may also be able to work and train under the supervision of a qualified nurse, with a view to qualifying as a nurse themselves. In terms of working hours, HCAs are likely to have to work shifts that could mean working at night. Also the positions could be either full- or part-time (“ Health Care Assistant Hourly Rate”, 10 Sep 2013).

- Academic, Experience, and Other Requirements. According to the “ Health Care Assistant Hourly Rate” article, (10 Sep 2013), employers are likely to expect HCA applicants to possess a minimum of a high school diploma or equivalent. Also, actual work experience may be required in some cases. The same article notes that key qualities of a successful HCA include being polite to all patients and treating them with kindness and compassion, as well as being able to communicate and work well with others in the team. Having a flexible schedule is also important, especially if shift working is involved.

- Pay Rates and Other Data. From a survey of 115 individuals, full-time annual salaries for HCAs ranged from €18, 226 to €32, 111 (median €21, 632). The hourly rates offered for HCAs were between €8. 87 and €14. 65 (“ Health Care Assistant Hourly Rate”, 10 Sep 2013). The hourly rates tend to

be influenced by the type of facility; the highest rates applicable for work in hospitals, whereas HCAs employed in a nursing home or similar environment are likely to be paid at rates towards the lower end of the range. The survey also found that about 80 percent of HCAs surveyed were women and 20 percent men; the men's hourly rates tending to be slightly higher on average than those for the women. In terms of experience of those surveyed 97 percent had more than one year's experience, and over 60 percent had between one and four years. For HCA jobs in the Irish Republic, the highest hourly rates are attainable in Dublin, followed by Cork and Galway in that order.

- Feedback from a Working HCA

Lynn Peppard is an HCA who graduated from the role of an attendant – until recently the only non-nursing job in the hospital ward (“ Care Assistant”, 2013). She relates how when Health service reorganization re-classified that job into three different roles, she opted for the HCA role, having completed the necessary HCA course previously during her 20 years as an attendant. In her particular work environment caring for 36 “ clients” (patients) there is typically one manager, four nurses, between three and four HCAs, a household Assistant and a Catering Assistant. She describes a fairly intensive day – beginning at 7: 45 am and ending at 8pm – dealing with all the various needs of the patients. Those include the less pleasant chores are those involved with bed pans and toilet problems and of course the death of a patient. She reports that the main challenges in her job are those of keeping up with evolving policies and procedures, knowing that all grades of hospital staff are accountable for their actions and decisions. However, she enjoys

working as part of a team and believes that the particular skills she brings to her role are good communication, including being an empathetic and good listener, using professional work practices, infection prevention and control, and working both as part of a team as well as using her own initiative.

- HCA Career Opportunities

As mentioned earlier in this report, not all HCAs are employed in hospitals. The article “ Health Care Assistant Hourly Rate”, (10 Sep 2013) survey covered HCAs working in hospitals, nursing / care homes, services for the elderly and in home health care. According to “ How to become a health care assistant” (2013), HCAs can also be found working in GP surgeries, hospices, prisons “ and many other places of work.”

Comparing the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland, the HCA role in general is no different, although in Northern Ireland the NHS is likely to be the employer, instead of the Health Service Executive which is the authority in the Republic. An important difference of course is that the pay is in Euros in the Republic and in pounds sterling in Northern Ireland.

Conclusions

The HCA is a most important role in patient care, and is very much “ hands-on”, dealing directly with the needs of patients on a daily basis, whilst working as part of a team including nurses, doctors and other staff. To become an HCA one must have minimum academic standards and ideally some work experience, but it can with training lead to becoming a qualified nurse. Pay rates vary according to environment and location (as is the case with many jobs), but the feedback from a working HCA is that the job, while

it can be challenging, is also very rewarding. One does need to be of the right personality to do the job well and to enjoy doing it, and if a particular HCA job involves unsocial hours working, a flexible personal schedule could also be important.

Annotated Bibliography

‘ Care Assistant’ 2013, Health Service Executive, viewed 10 September 2013,

This source is the Health Service Executive website (Republic of Ireland) which covers many aspects of the authority, but particularly (for our interest) jobs in the HSE. The particular page used as a source provides a firsthand account by a working HCA about her job, though the site can also be used to search for jobs with the HSE, including HCA positions.

‘ Health Care Assistant HourlyRate’ 10 Sep 2013, PayScale. com., viewed 10 September 2013,

This source comes from the website of PayScale. com, a site that facilitates international searches for pay rates and other data about specific job types. The actual page accessed covers the position of an HCA in Ireland.

‘ How to become a health care assistant’ 2013, Royal College of Nursing, viewed 10 September 2013,

This source is from the Royal College of Nursing website under the heading “ Nursing UK and abroad” and provides guidance for those wishing to become a Health Care Assistant in the UK. The page accessed also provides a link to the NHS Careers website for further information.