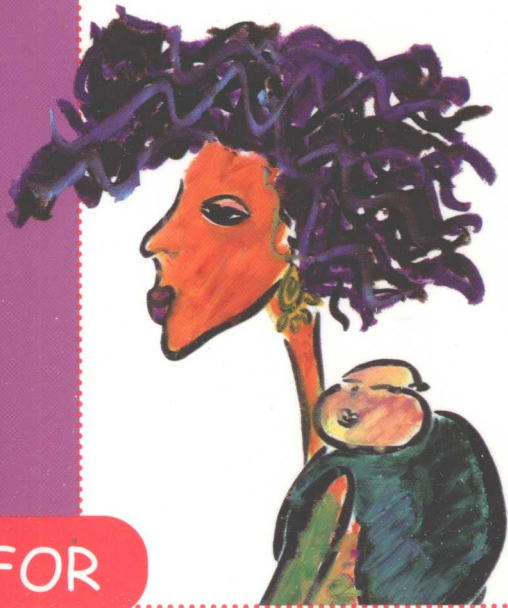


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The Call to Caregiving

For many of us, the tragic events of September 11, 2001, changed everything. Those whose lives were directly touched by the loss of a loved one, a job, or a place to live were forced to rethink their goals and their lives. For the millions of us who watched the events in stunned horror from the safety of our homes that morning, the need to rethink things was gentler and yet, for many, no less insistent. We suddenly were reminded that there is no guarantee of tomorrow. As the shock was barely wearing off, millions of Americans from every walk of life responded to the events of September 11th by focusing on giving. The world has seldom seen a faster or larger response to a human disaster. People showed they cared. People gave. People responded.

In the welling up of emotion that is natural after a shocking disaster, many people looked at their current jobs and said, “Not good enough.” Watching the heroic New York Fire Department and other first responders made many folks realize that life has more meaning when you are involved in helping others. Many people said to themselves that the time had come to consider new paths, and perhaps new careers.

In those terrible weeks of recovery, something interesting happened in our nation. Truck drivers entered school to become teachers. Retired executives came out of retirement to create and run new charitable organizations. Stockbrokers switched to teaching high school. Moms and dads decided to spend more time with

their children and to tell them out loud how much they are loved. There are probably thousands of examples of people who made large and small changes in the ensuing months. For many people, and perhaps for you, a life spent caring for others is the kind of life that is filled with meaning.

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An Overview of Caregiving

Each morning, noon, and night, thousands of caregivers—both men and women—experience a warm welcome as they arrive to start their shifts, watching over or caring for the sick, the disturbed, the lonely, and the elderly, or the very young, all of whom require caregivers. At the end of the shift, their places are taken by other caregivers—a never-ending cycle that calls for untold numbers of dedicated workers.

The caregiver—whether in the home, the hospital, nursing home, a home health agency, or a rescue squad—has become one of the most important people in the health field. Thousands of families could not properly care for a sick family member were it not for the therapist, aide, or nurse who comes daily to provide care. Hospitals need aides to perform countless duties, many formerly performed by the professional nursing staff, now assigned more administrative duties. Nursing homes depend on the nurses and aides who provide the care their residents require.

There are countless others who have equally important responsibilities as they care for children, elderly people, and others who need help. For example, social service workers daily shoulder the often heartbreaking tasks of helping broken families and tormented individuals, trying to solve myriad problems.

As you read, you may be surprised to discover many avenues open to those who seek a career in some aspect of caregiving. For example, the “support staff”—the men and women who provide office services—are essential to the operation of every hospital, nursing home, and other caregiving agency. They hold titles such

as administrator, receptionist, computer operator, accountant, public relations manager, and file clerk. In hospitals and other institutions, essential employees include not only the office staff, but also those who work as housekeepers, custodians, maintenance specialists, cafeteria workers, porters, and other nonmedical personnel.

The primary focus of this book is positions that call for briefer training periods, more practical for those with limited financial resources who need to start earning as soon as possible. This book excludes coverage of members of the professional medical corps such as doctors, dentists, and specialists who are so vital to our health care system.

You can, however, obtain information about these professions in some of the books listed in Appendix A. Data on the total number of workers, earnings, employment outlook, and minimum years of training required for medical professionals as well as other caregivers are presented in Appendix B.

.....

Personal Qualifications

Because caregiving includes so many different kinds of jobs, there is probably a place for you, regardless of your mental or physical abilities, interests, or personality.

Personal qualifications for nonprofessional positions are not usually difficult to meet. The position you choose should be yours if you display an interest in learning, a sense of responsibility, and willingness to work hard and bring to the job the skills required.

But if you are looking forward to a career as a registered nurse, licensed practical nurse, certified nurse's aide, therapist, emergency medical technician, or other paramedical job, the requirements can be quite demanding:

- Good physical health and emotional strength. These are of first importance to enable you to tolerate the long, irregular

hours and bear the general strain of being available during times of emergency.

- Reliability and a sense of responsibility. The lives of others may be in your hands on occasion. The willingness with which you use those hands, and the care and conscientiousness with which you direct them, will play an important part in recovery, recuperation, and a return to satisfying life for many you have not yet met.
- Eagerness to learn and willingness to study hard. Modern medical skills and techniques require application to books, computers, laboratory work, lectures, and each aspect of the training program.
- Intellectual curiosity, the kind that makes it difficult for you to leave an unsolved problem or walk away from an unanswered question, is a lifetime “must,” not only during your years of education, but throughout your professional life.
- A genuine liking for people, an understanding of their fears and needs, must be developed and strengthened throughout your career, for you will deal with people who want and need your personal as well as your professional best.
- Humor, tolerance, discretion, and a giving nature are the other attributes you should have.

Every profession has certain drawbacks, and caregiving is no exception. There are not many opportunities to make a fortune, although salaries have improved and continue to rise. Chances for advancement are also good. The work may be harder and the hours longer than in another occupation. You may be exposed to much pain and suffering, mental disturbance, and human travail and sorrow. You may be required to take long and expensive training. You will be expected to demonstrate an unselfishness that places job before self-interest.

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Job Availability

No matter where you live, you will find caregivers working in hospitals, medical offices, homes, child- and senior-care facilities, or in organizations dedicated to helping the young, elderly, indigent, sick, mentally disturbed, and those suffering from substance abuse and other problems. As the population grows, and the number of seniors continues to increase, the need to provide elder care will become especially urgent.

Those who live in rural areas may have to travel a distance to work. Unlike some fields, such as transportation, manufacturing, or tourism, where jobs are concentrated in definite places, opportunities for caregivers are found wherever people live.

Because so much of this book is devoted to opportunities in the health field, projected employment growth information from the United States Department of Labor Web page is included here:

“Wage and salary employment in the health services industry is projected to increase more than 25 percent through 2010, compared with an average of 16 percent for all industries.... Employment growth is expected to account for 2.8 million new jobs—13 percent of all wage and salary jobs added to the economy over the 2000–2010 period. Projected rates of employment growth for the various segments of this industry range from 10 percent in hospitals, the largest and slowest growing industry segment, to 68 percent in the much smaller home health care services.”

.....

Rewards

Here are some of the rewards you will find as a caregiver:

- Training, whether it is for a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) or for a brain surgeon, will bring you a measure of prestige.

- Job stability helps make up for lower salaries.
- Working conditions are usually good.
- Institutions and agencies are becoming more generous with fringe benefits.
- People dedicated to their professions make pleasant associates. You will experience a genuine sense of partnership with others in your work.
- Doing a worthwhile job brings true personal satisfaction.

No matter what your caregiving position may be, you will feel a certain pride in your work. You will feel pride in providing an essential, sometimes life-preserving service and pride in being part of a nationwide body of men and women who are helping humanity, whether you are the surgeon, nurse, aide, nanny, social worker, or even the receptionist or computer operator. It takes all kinds of caregivers to provide the care the world needs.

The Path to Caregiving

If you are drawn to the idea of caring for others in some capacity but hesitate to investigate the field because you are uncomfortable about your age or have limited education or no money to pay for schooling, this chapter should encourage you to pursue your career search.

Age Is No Barrier

You can be twelve years old serving as a baby-sitter or eighty and working as a companion. Age is no barrier for caretakers. Although the majority of caregivers probably start their careers right after completing high school, college, or graduate school, it is never too late to join the army of concerned men and women who serve those in need of health, personal, or other kinds of care. It is not uncommon to make a mid-career shift and find employment in an entirely different field, to join the workforce after raising children and managing a home, or to spend retirement years in a new field. In fact, it has been estimated that over a lifetime, many people hold between eight and twelve different jobs. Therefore, no matter what your age, you can find new purpose in your life—just like Hilda Swenson and Roderick Hector.

When Hilda Swenson turned forty, she made two decisions: she would leave the frigid Minnesota winters and trade her tiresome accounting job for something that would help humanity. She had

done her share of volunteer work, but now she wanted to become a caring nurse. Aware that in some areas there was no need for additional nurses, she knew she would need to do some research before relocating. When she vacationed in Florida, she visited a number of hospitals, nursing homes, and life-care establishments and decided that she could find employment once she obtained the necessary training. A year later, she had her LPN certificate and fulfilled her goal.

Similarly, Roderick Hector, a high school coach, realized that with the school budget crunch in California, it would be only a matter of time before he lost his job. Like Hilda, he wanted to work with people in a health setting and decided to become a physical therapist, another occupation that called for only a year in graduate school since he already had a bachelor's degree.

Hilda and Roderick are examples of how those approaching midlife can switch occupations and pursue a far more satisfying career—with proper preparation!

Jobs for All Levels of Training

Without a high school diploma, you face the greatest difficulty finding a job. Low-paying positions, such as kitchen work in institutions, custodian positions, inside or outside maintenance jobs, or hospital porter assignments, lifting patients or moving heavy objects, are probably the most common jobs in the field of care-taking for those seeking work without a high school education. If you find yourself needing that high school diploma, contact the guidance counseling office at your high school or vocational-technical school. The staff there can direct you to the resources you need to obtain a high school diploma or a G.E.D. (general equivalency diploma).

On the other hand, if you have a high school diploma, you should find many more job openings, especially if you have acquired some useful skill. As you progress up the educational

ladder to a certificate from a vocational-technical school or community college, you have tangible skills to offer and become eligible for better-paying jobs. Some of the caregiving vocational-technical skills you can learn in two years or less include:

- Dental assistant
- Dental receptionist
- Dietetic technician
- Doctor's assistant
- Emergency medical technician (EMT)
- Food-service specialist
- Inhalation therapy technician
- Medical assistant
- Medical/dental receptionist
- Medical laboratory technician
- Medical office manager
- Medical secretary
- Nurse's aide
- Operating-room technician
- Orderly
- Practical nurse
- Vocational nurse

A college diploma elevates one into another world where responsibilities and earnings, as well as the breadth of job opportunities, are much greater.

.....

No Experience Needed for Entry-Level Jobs

Joyce Kabien had served as a candy striper in a nearby hospital during high school. Although her assignments were usually of a routine unskilled nature—delivering mail, operating the book

cart, escorting patients to physical therapy, serving between-meal snacks—she had learned enough about how a hospital operates to know that she would find satisfaction working there after high school. Because of her volunteer service, the administrator gladly gave her an entry-level job in the cafeteria, which enabled Joyce to attend night school to train as a Certified Nurse's Aide (CNA). After she worked in this position for a time, she returned to school to take the necessary courses to become a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN).

Similarly, Warren Emmons worked after school and during vacations for a nursing home. He cut grass, trimmed, raked, and picked up trash. Once out of high school, the home employed him as a full-time custodian, enabling him to continue his education at a community college to prepare for an all-around maintenance job. He soon took the place of the retiring maintenance director.

Although volunteer service during high school is not a necessary job prerequisite, such work acquaints one with an institution and provides an advantage over someone who does not have this background.

Homemakers—men and women who perform various duties required to take care of a home, which may include caring for the children of a working couple—can learn their duties on the job. If homemaking appeals to you, but you do not know what is expected, offer to work for someone who will train you in the home for a limited time. Actually, many nurses seek such part-time jobs when hospitals have to cut back on nursing schedules.

Unlicensed health aides are somewhat like homemakers. Patients who are sick, incapacitated, or recuperating from an accident or operation may require the services of someone who can be with them to help them dress, go to the bathroom, bathe, and even eat. Such a patient does not require skilled nursing care, or if needed on a limited basis, a home health agency or visiting nurse association can provide the necessary professional assistance.

When Carrie Goldsfarb left high school, she was not sure that she wanted to train for a position in health care. She decided to work in the field but not invest time and money for training until she was certain about such a career. She found a position acting as a companion to an elderly woman disabled by arthritis, but otherwise in good health. Carrie found it challenging and rewarding to help the woman prepare meals, do light cleaning, and shop. Based on this experience, she decided that caring for others would offer personally satisfying career possibilities and enrolled in a nursing course.

..... **Training Available While You Work**

Most cities and many towns offer a wide scope of job training courses for those who want to acquire new skills while working.

Night school was the traditional training ground for immigrants who arrived in eastern seaboard cities. Unfamiliar with the language, they were eligible only for the lowest-paid jobs. History tells us how these courageous, hard-working, and determined men and women struggled to get an education, and many of them eventually rose to top-level positions in business, industry, and their chosen professions. They could do it then; anyone can do it today. Night school at community colleges and vocational or training schools still enables Americans to learn new skills each year.

On-the-job training is available in some institutions. Some far-sighted employers agree to arrange working schedules to enable employees to take daytime courses that are otherwise not available. Some employers will even pay tuition fees for employees eager to improve themselves. The administrator of a large private hospital in the Southeast encouraged CNAs on staff to take daytime courses that would eventually allow them to become certified as LPNs.

Correspondence or home study courses leading to a certificate or even a college degree are always a possibility. The Distance Education and Training Council provides a wide range of information. You'll find the mailing address and website listed at the end of this chapter.

A good time to improve yourself is between jobs. Since Enrico Caprizi was ten years old, he wanted to become an emergency medical technician because he had seen a team in action. His family, however, would hear nothing of it and pointed him toward a banking career. Working as a teller, he managed to save enough to enable him to resign and pay for his EMT training and living expenses until he could finish school and obtain permanent employment.

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Financial Help May Be Available

There's no such thing as a free lunch. However, those who need financial help to attend school may be surprised to find that it is sometimes possible to obtain a scholarship or student loan to help finance their training or education. Alec Studley wanted to become a therapist but lacked the necessary funds to continue his education after high school. He learned that a state program would pay his tuition as well as provide a small stipend toward his living expenses while in school. This made it possible to realize his ambition.

If you need financial assistance, first check the school catalog for such information and discuss your needs with the director of admissions or the administrator. If your search for aid is unsuccessful, inquire at the public library and your state's Department of Education. They may have helpful information or can direct you to the proper agency. Those bound for college, either undergraduate or graduate, should consult the books listed in the next section.

For Further Information

Organizations

Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of
Technology
2101 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 302
Arlington, VA 22201
www.accsct.org

The Distance Education and Training Council
1601 Eighteenth Street NW
Washington, DC 20009
www.detc.org

Suggested Reading

- Cassidy, Daniel J. *The Scholarship Book: The Complete Guide to Private-Sector Scholarships, Grants, and Loans for Undergraduates* (5th edition). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1996.
- Eberts, Marjorie, and Margaret Gisler. *Careers for Good Samaritans and Other Humanitarian Types*. Chicago: VGM Career Books, 1998.
- Kerby, Debra M. *Fund Your Way Through College: Uncovering 1,700 Great Opportunities in Undergraduate Financial Aid*. Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1994.
- Peterson's Paying Less for College* (13th edition). Princeton, NJ: Peterson's Guides, 1996.