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Medicine

Other Health Professionals

Medicine is not restricted to physicians. A wide variety of health care practitioners work in this exciting field. By far the largest professional group is nurses. Registered nurses help physicians during examinations, treatment, and surgery. They observe, evaluate, and record patients' symptoms, administer medications, and provide other care. Nurse practitioners perform basic duties once reserved for physicians, such as diagnosing and treating common illnesses and prescribing medication. Certified nurse-midwives care for mothers during pregnancy and deliver babies. Nurse-anesthetists administer anesthesia to patients during surgery. Licensed practical nurses provide basic bedside care for sick patients under the supervision of registered nurses and physicians.

Physician assistants deliver basic health services under the general supervision of a physician. They examine patients, order X rays and laboratory tests, and prescribe drugs or other treatment. In some rural areas, physician assistants provide all basic health care for patients, consulting with a supervising physician by telephone or electronic mail.

Dentists diagnose, treat, and help prevent diseases of the teeth, gums, and other tissues in the mouth and jaws. Most are general practitioners, but many specialize in a particular area of dental health. Orthodontists treat teeth that are poorly aligned; oral surgeons operate on the jaw and mouth; periodontists specialize in gum disease; pediatric dentists care for children; endodontists perform root canals; prosthodontists make and insert artificial teeth and dentures. Other dental professionals include dental hygienists who assist dentists in surgery, clean teeth, and provide fluoride treatments. They advise patients on proper oral hygiene techniques to prevent tooth and gum disease.

For more information about other health care practitioners, see the table on Allied Health Professionals.