

Healthcare

THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR OFFERS GRADUATES MANY POSSIBILITIES, AND WHILE DOCTORS, DENTISTS AND NURSES TEND TO BE THE PROFESSIONALS THAT SPRING TO MIND, THERE ARE MANY OTHER OCCUPATIONS AVAILABLE TO GRADUATES, FROM THOSE IN THE PHARMACEUTICAL SALES AND MARKETING INDUSTRY TO CLINICAL RESEARCH.

The jobs

The healthcare manufacturing industry offers jobs for pharmacists, microbiologists, and those who studied B.Sc. degrees such as cell biology or biochemistry. According to Barbara Stowe of Medsearch Recruitment (www.medsearch.co.za), the market is relatively small and fairly robust.

Stowe points to pharmaceutical sales and marketing as another healthcare sector where B.Sc. graduates with biological sciences qualifications can find work, as well as medically trained staff, such as nurses, radiographers, physiotherapists, and even B.Com. graduates who studied matric science and biology.

Similarly, these graduates can also find positions in medical equipment sales and marketing, where ICU theatre nurses and clinical technologists or radiographers are especially popular among employers. According to Stowe, some theatre experience is preferable, but not essential.

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Clinical posts include nurses, doctors, dentists, radiographers, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, dieticians, clinical technologists, sonographers, ICU sisters and theatre nurses. Graduates with qualifications in these areas are in high demand, even more so if they have specialised in a specific area of clinical medicine, such as paediatrics, obstetrics or cardiology. Other specialist professions include genetics, gerontology (the study of the human aging process), surgery (such as an orthopaedic surgeon who specialises in skeletal surgery or a neurosurgeon who works specifically in nervous system surgery), anaesthesiology and many others.

In the field of clinical research, Stowe says that private research organisations tend to prefer graduates with degrees in pharmacology (such as registered pharmacists or those with an MPharm qualification) or any biological science research experience. Registered nurses are also accepted, although graduates wishing to work as clinical research associates should ideally have a biological sciences qualification, some clinical experience and good computer skills. Willingness to travel and attention to detail are also characteristics that will stand candidates in good stead, especially in the auditing of clinical research sites.

Other jobs within the healthcare industry include optometry, social work, occupational therapy, research chemistry and veterinary science.

Qualifications

Because the healthcare sector offers such a diverse range of professions, there are a number of qualifications available to students, depending on the area in which they wish to work.

- B.Sc. with specialisation in Medical Sciences (MedSci) – this degree prepares students in the basic medical sciences and gives a broad background. Those wishing to establish a particular field will need to study further and obtain an honours, masters or Ph.D. degree in either medical sciences, physiology, pharmacology or chemical pathology.
- B.Sc. in Audiology, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy or Speech-Language Pathology – Bachelor of Science degrees with various specialisations for those students wishing to work in one of the above particular fields of healthcare.
- MBChB – Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery. This degree is the minimum requirement for doctors and specialists.
- Bachelor of Nursing (Bcur) – for students wanting to work as professional nurses or midwives, or even in the pharmaceutical sales and marketing industry.

Personality checklist

While every job will require a different set of skills and personality traits, those wishing to work in the healthcare industry will need to possess the following characteristics:

- Empathy and understanding
- The ability to stay calm and work well under pressure
- A genuine concern for people
- An enquiring mind
- A can-do attitude
- People skills

Those working in clinical posts will also need:

- Initiative and the ability to think for themselves
- A willingness to keep learning throughout their careers
- Humility
- Attention to detail

Pros

- If healthcare is your passion, rest assured that you will always be able to find a job and make a difference in South Africa's medical sector.
- As far as pharmaceutical manufacturing, marketing and sales are concerned, says Stowe, it's a stimulating, exciting sector to be in, although it has been affected by new pricing control legislation.
- South Africa's healthcare industry leads the way in Africa and its medical professionals are sought-over throughout the world. International job opportunities are therefore a possibility for those graduates wishing to acquire overseas experience.
- According to The South Africa Pharmaceuticals and Healthcare Report published by *Business Monitor*, 'South Africa has one of the most developed pharmaceutical markets in the Middle East and Africa (MEA) region'. The industry provides ample career opportunities and is set to continue developing steadily.

Cons

- Stowe points out that in the field of clinical medicine, graduates may find working in a state hospital or clinic challenging, as hours are long and these facilities tend to lack necessary resources and adequate funding. On the other hand, while standards are high at private healthcare facilities and most people enjoy working here, competition is fierce for the positions available.
- The healthcare sector is strictly regulated and legislation is constantly being revised, which can be challenging, especially to those involved in the manufacturing, sales and marketing part of the industry, which is relatively small by global standards.
- Stowe observes that the field of medical research (which is different to clinical research) offers limited opportunities in South Africa at this point, as it is as yet very small.
- While working in the healthcare sector can be very rewarding, it is not for the faint-hearted and graduates will need to be prepared to face the reality of working with the sick every day.

- The ability to remain calm and in control under all circumstances

Healthcare administrators, on the other hand, will need:

- Strong management, organisational and planning skills
- The ability to respond quickly and efficiently
- An understanding approach that is less critical than other administrative environments might require

