

## **Volunteering in the Hospital Sector**

Four out of the ten fastest growing jobs today are in health-related careers. Tremendous growth in this field is expected to continue between now and 2014. (CNN Money) In addition, 13 out of the 15 highest paying jobs are in the health professions. (MSN Money) One way to learn more about this field and to determine whether a career in this area might be a match for your interests and skills is to volunteer in your local hospital.

Teenage hospital volunteers were once called candy stripers, a name derived from the red and white striped jumpers traditionally worn by female volunteers. Today male and female volunteers wear “dress to impress” clothing of their own choosing or perhaps a polo shirt embroidered with both the volunteer and hospital logo. In some hospitals, female volunteers do wear the traditional pin-striped apron of the candy striper.

Duties of volunteers vary widely depending upon the facility’s needs and the interests of the volunteers. They may staff gift shops, help with administrative tasks, assist visitors to the hospital, visit with patients, transport patients to radiology, deliver flowers or books, assemble and disassemble charts, or work on educational projects.

Once you decide you would like to explore this field, the first step is to contact the hospital’s volunteer office. The Coordinator of Volunteers will ask you to come in for an interview to discuss your reasons for volunteering at a health care facility, to learn about your particular skills and interests, and to determine if the setting will be a good match. The match is an area for you to focus on as well as you go through the interview process. In addition, the Coordinator will ask you to fill out an application that will include a CORI check, a requirement for all volunteer positions. CORI stands for Criminal Offender Record Information and is a compilation of your Massachusetts criminal history. You will also be required to have a TB test and may need to supply a copy of your immunization record. When all of these requirements are met, you will be given your uniform, if there is one, an identification tag and asked to attend a training session to review pertinent hospital policies such as dress code, infection control, and, most especially, confidentiality laws. These laws are a part of HIPAA, a federal regulation designed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the health care system. You will also learn the specific requirements of your job.

Hospital volunteers must be at least 14 years old and generally work a minimum of 3 or 4 hours each week for at least 10 weeks during the school year. As a volunteer, you will need to interact with a diverse group of people; these may be other volunteers, employees of the hospital, and, of course, the patients; some of these individuals, such as the elderly, young children, or individuals who are handicapped, you may not typically encounter in your daily life. Julia Dunbar, former Coordinator of Volunteers for Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital, believes there are several important characteristics to be a good health care volunteer. First on her list is a positive attitude. One should be eager to get involved in the volunteer program and be willing to make a serious commitment. One should also present oneself well. Lynn Stewart, Volunteer Coordinator at New England Baptist Hospital, adds dependability, compassion, and patience to the list of key personal

traits of a successful volunteer. Many programs require prospective volunteers to submit recommendations attesting to these characteristics with their applications.

Some hospitals offer unique programs for teenagers who want to explore more intensely various hospital careers. For example, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center sponsors a Summer Health Corps Program for students ages 14-17 from July 7 – August 14, 2008, five hours a day, Monday - Thursday. This is an educational, hands on program that helps teens explore various careers while gaining experience in a hospital setting. Students work in admitting, outpatient clinics, transportation, the gift shop, and other areas. They attend orientation and training sessions conducted by the medical staff to learn about policies and procedures such as fire safety and infection control and receive a tour of the medical facility. In addition, they participate in weekly tours of different departments where they learn about the functions of the various medical center staff working in those areas. These tours may include the Emergency Department, Radiology, and the Neonatal Unit. For more information about this program, call 617-667-3026.

New England Baptist Hospital often attracts teenagers, generally ages 16-18, who think they may want to explore the field of orthopedic medicine since the hospital specializes in this area. For example, volunteers at the Baptist are able to shadow physical therapists as a possible career interest. They can also explore the areas of medical records, the dietary field, and the blood bank. For more information about working at the Baptist, call 617-754-5173.

Most programs celebrate their volunteers with a luncheon or pizza party in the spring. At this time, students are honored for their work perhaps with pins representing the number of hours served or a gift demonstrating the hospital's appreciation for the work they have done. The volunteers at a hospital become a part of the hospital family. This experience may or may not lead you to a future career, but it will certainly leave you with a feeling that you have helped to make the lives of both the patients and the hospital personnel more pleasant and efficient.