

Put Your Bachelor's in Healthcare Administration to Work

by [Peter Vogt](#)

MonsterTRAK Career Coach

When you watch popular hospital TV shows like "Grey's Anatomy" or "House," all you ever see are the people in clinical jobs -- doctors, nurses and the like. It's as though the complex healthcare organizations these people work for run themselves.

Not true, of course. Behind the scenes, and in a variety of settings, not just hospitals, you'll find dedicated people who don't see patients but are nonetheless essential to the success of the organization and the healthcare field as a whole. You can become one of these professionals by pursuing a bachelor's degree in healthcare administration (also known as health administration, healthcare management or health services administration, depending on the particular school and program).

Know in advance that a bachelor's degree in healthcare administration will take you only so far. "It is well-recognized that if someone wants to get into the upper levels of management in a hospital or larger organization, that person will need a [master's degree](#)," says Carla Wiggins, PhD, chair of the healthcare administration program at Idaho State University.

Internship Can Jump-Start Your Job Search

But a bachelor's degree can open plenty of entry-level healthcare doors on its own, especially if it comes from a college or university program certified by the [Association of University Programs in Health Administration](#) (AUPHA). Why? Because AUPHA-certified programs require their students to complete an extensive internship in a healthcare setting -- critical experience that often leads directly to a job after graduation.

"Some non-AUPHA and AUPHA-noncertified programs...don't require [an internship], which is a big mistake, I think," Wiggins says.

Sharon Buchbinder, RN, PhD, coordinator of the healthcare management program at Towson University adds: "The internship enables students to get a head start on the real world."

Who Will Hire You?

If you're wondering what exactly you will be able to do with a bachelor's in healthcare administration and where, it's helpful to think of your options in terms of the four employment sectors specified by the AUPHA:

- **Healthcare Providers:** Hospitals, group physician practices, clinics, nursing homes, outpatient care centers, mental health organizations and rehabilitation centers.
- **Healthcare Suppliers:** Healthcare management companies, pharmaceutical firms, biotechnology companies and educational organizations.
- **Insurance Organizations:** Health maintenance organizations, preferred-provider organizations, state-administered health insurance programs and private insurance companies that cater to the healthcare market.
- **Policy Organizations:** State public health agencies, nonprofit organizations with health-oriented missions and the like.

What Jobs Can You Look For?

A review of the jobs Towson's health management grads landed exemplifies the variety of entry-level career possibilities you can pursue with a bachelor's in healthcare administration. For example, among Towson's class of 2005, you'll find:

- An office manager for a physician practice.
- A business development associate for a clinical pharmacology center.
- A staff auditor for a healthcare financial consulting firm.
- An executive administrative assistant for a nursing facility.
- An administrative medical assistant for a hospital anesthesia department.
- A program reimbursement specialist for a pharmaceutical company.

While some of Wiggins's students go straight to graduate school, most others end up in ambulatory-care management positions. "Some walk into group practice administrator positions right out of our program, especially if they've done their internships in that area," Wiggins says. "But more likely, they'll start as the office manager or assistant administrator in a group practice, or as a specialized manager, such as financial manager, human resources or information technology specialist in a large group practice."

The specific job you land -- and the specific setting in which you land it -- will depend to some degree on where you look geographically, according to Wiggins.

"In the very, very rural intermountain west of Idaho, the kinds of jobs my students get upon graduation are entry-level management in hospitals, maybe an assistant to the department head or mid-level in long-term care, or maybe assistant administrator of a nursing home," she says.