



Fifth Edition

PROFESSIONALISM IN HEALTH CARE

A Primer for Career Success

Sherry Makely

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Professionalism in Health Care

A Primer for Career Success

5TH Edition

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Preface

Who This Book Is For and Why It's Important

Professionalism in Health Care: A Primer for Career Success, 5th Edition, is designed for students enrolled in nursing and health sciences educational programs in colleges and universities, vocational-technical schools, hospitals, high schools, and on-the-job training programs. This book is also beneficial in orientation sessions for new employees and for in-service and refresher classes for experienced health care workers. Text information is applicable to all health careers and all types, sizes, and locations of health care settings.

This book provides information that is essential to the success of today's health care workers. Hands-on technical skills remain a high priority, but good character, a strong work ethic, and excellent personal and professional traits and behaviors have become more important than ever before. Statistics indicate a growing concern with theft, fraud, and behavioral problems in the workplace. Poor attendance, interpersonal conflicts, disregard for quality, and disrespect for authority all too often lead to employees being fired from their jobs. The inappropriate use of cell phones, digital devices and communication, and social media are causing major concerns.

With a growing emphasis on customer service, the patient experience, cultural competence, quality improvement, patient safety, and corporate compliance, health care employers are increasingly seeking workers with strong “soft skills” and “people skills”—people who communicate appropriately, work well on teams, respect and value differences, use limited resources efficiently, and interact effectively with coworkers, patients, and guests.

Regardless of job title or discipline, every health care student and worker must understand the importance of professionalism and the need to perform in a professional, ethical, legal, and competent manner. Developing and strengthening professional traits and behaviors has become a major challenge for both health care educators and employers. *Professionalism in Health Care: A Primer for Career Success* helps meet that challenge. It describes the professional standards that apply to all health care workers—the common ground that everyone shares in providing the highest quality of health care and service excellence for patients, visitors, and guests.

What This Book Covers

Professionalism in Health Care: A Primer for Career Success discusses in detail the following topics:

- The key elements of professionalism
- The health care industry and your role
- Your work ethic and performance

- Personal traits of health care professionals
- Relationships, teamwork, and communication skills
- Cultural competence and patient care
- Professionalism and your personal life
- The practicum experience
- Employment and professional development

New to This Edition

This 5th edition includes updated, expanded, and new content, photographs, and special features.

In response to growing concerns among instructors, employers, and patients, a new *Professionalism Online* feature has been added in each chapter of the text. Feature topics include: Digital Communication and Social Media, Digital Communication and Privacy, Your Reputation Online, Digital Communication and Etiquette Online, Diversity in Social Media and Online Resources for Patients, Health and Safety Concerns with Social Media, Complying with Your Practicum Site's Protocol, and Establishing a Professional Online Presence. These features provide extensive discussions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of social media and digital communication; the appropriate use of cell phones and other digital devices; and how the posting and sharing of content on social media sites can impact the privacy of patients, the confidentiality of health information, and the professional reputations of health care workers and their employers.

Each chapter has five new features: *Hot Topics*, *By the Numbers*, *Trends and Issues*, *The More You Know*, and *Professionalism Online*. These sections provide a wealth of interesting and supportive information on diverse topics that include: Obesity in America, Medicare Scams and Fraud, Personal Values and Ethical Conduct, Using Resilience to Deal with Change and Adversity, Multiple Chronic Diseases on the Rise, Contending with Conservative Dress Codes, From Prescription Painkillers to Heroin, and Making the Most of Your Time Off, to name just a few.

A new *Case Study* in each chapter picks up where the 4th edition left off. The case study follows the professional career of Carla, a fictional medical assistant, as she becomes a supervisor and deals with a variety of real-life behavioral issues in a large physician practice.

Additional enhancements in the 5th edition include the following:

- Chapter One, *The Health Care Industry and Your Role*, has been updated to include recent developments in health care reform and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, along with other current trends and issues that impact health care workers, employers, and patients.
- Chapter Two, *Your Work Ethic and Performance*, has a new section discussing the importance of self-awareness, mindfulness, and acting with intent.
- Chapter Three, *Personal Traits of the Health Care Professional*, has a new section discussing negligence, malpractice, civil and criminal law, libel, slander, and other legal aspects.

- Chapter Four, *Relationships, Teamwork, and Communication Skills*, has been expanded with new content including: The Essential Elements of Communication, Factors that Influence Your Communication with Others, and Barriers to Communication. Additional new topics include Health Literacy and Hearing Loss.
- Chapter Five, *Cultural Competence and Patient Care*, has new content on patient consent, patient rights and responsibilities, and online patient portals. The Case Study involves a transgender patient who believes she has been disrespected by office staff.
- Chapter Six, *Professionalism and Your Personal Life*, has a new section on Self-Care for Health Care Workers with information on nutrition and a healthy diet, personal risk factors, and the importance of resilience. Text covering the standards for appropriate attire (dress codes) and the importance of exercising caution in after-hours behavior has been updated and reinforced.
- Chapter Seven, *The Practicum Experience*, has been expanded to include a new section on Safety at Work and a discussion about drug testing in states that have legalized the medicinal and recreational use of marijuana.
- Chapter Eight, *Employment and Professional Development*, has been reorganized and updated to emphasize the increasing use of Internet job boards and online job applications. New content provides resources for researching labor trends and projections, and reinforces the importance of leadership skills and participation in professional associations.

Additional changes in the 5th edition include the following:

- The *For More Information* sections in each chapter have been updated and expanded to provide additional resources.
- A new section, *Closing Thoughts*, has been added at the end of the text to summarize the key concepts that students need to think about and remember as they complete their education and join the health care workforce.
- The *Objectives, Reality Checks, Key Points, Chapter Review Questions, What If? Scenarios*, and *Appendices* have been updated and expanded.
- More than 55 new terms and definitions have been added to the *Glossary*, for a total of 318 terms.
- The *Instructor Resource Manual* has been revised to reflect updated, expanded, and new content in the text.

Information for Students

Students should read each chapter in the textbook and complete the end-of-chapter learning activities prior to moving on to the next chapter. The end-of-chapter learning activities include *Chapter Review Questions* and *What If? Scenarios*.

Information for Instructors

This textbook is designed for use in classroom and online courses. The book may also be used for personal reading, for orienting and training new health care workers, and for in-service and continuing education sessions for experienced health care workers.

The textbook may be incorporated into introductory, core curriculum, or capstone courses; used as preparation for practicum experiences; and used for workshops on topics such as Employment Strategies, Career Development, and Work Readiness. Instructors may choose to use this text in a general introductory course and then supplement learning later on through an advanced, discipline-specific course.

All ancillaries for this textbook including the Instructor Resource Manual, Power Point slides, and the Test Bank are accessible for download through the Pearson catalog as well as through the new MyHealthProfessionsLab for customers who purchase the digital solution. The new 5th edition MyHealthProfessionsLab features interactive activities that include self-assessments, preparatory materials for job interviews, role-playing exercises, video-based critical-thinking scenarios, and gradable homework questions.

In Closing

We hope you find *Professionalism in Health Care: A Primer for Career Success*, 5th Edition informative, thought-provoking, and beneficial.

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Health Care Professionals

Recognition as a health care professional is something that has to be earned—a reputation that's developed and maintained each and every day you come to work. Professionalism is a state of mind, a way of “being,” “knowing,” and “doing” that sets you apart from others. It gives direction to how you look, think, and act. It brings together who you are as a person, what you value, how you treat other people, what you contribute in the workplace, and how seriously you take your job. Professionals don't just work to earn a paycheck. Income is important, but professionals view their work as a source of pride and a reflection of the role they play in society.

Health care professionals are good at what they do—and they like doing it. They enjoy helping others and knowing they've made a difference. Professionals have their “act together”—and it shows. They set high standards for their performance and achieve them. They see the “big picture” in health care and know where they fit in. Professionals care about quality and how to improve it. They treat everyone they meet with dignity and respect. And they continually strive to grow and to learn.



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Introduction

Opportunity is missed by most because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.

Thomas Alva Edison, Inventor, 1847–1931

Recognition as a Health Care Professional

There's no doubt about it. When you're sick or injured, or when a family member or friend needs health care, you want to be certain that you and your loved ones are cared for by **professionals** (people with experience and skills who are engaged in a specific occupation for pay or as a means of livelihood). Thinking back to the times when you've had a doctor's appointment, visited an **outpatient** clinic (a facility for care outside of a hospital) or emergency department, or been hospitalized for tests or treatments, you probably encountered many different types of health care workers. Although most of these workers performed their duties in a professional manner, you may have encountered a few who did not. We would like to think that everyone who works in health care functions as a professional, but experience has shown that this is not always the case.

What is a professional? How can you recognize a professional when you see one? What does "taking a professional approach" to one's work mean? Why is professionalism important? What must you learn as a student to prepare for future recognition as a health care professional yourself?

According to *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Edition*, a *professional* is a person "with much experience and great skill in a specified role" who is "engaged in a specific occupation for pay or as a means of livelihood." As we look around us, we see many examples of professionals in different walks of life. In sports, for example, professional status is awarded to gifted athletes who have surpassed amateur events and moved into high-paying, major league competitions. In medicine, law, and science, people like doctors, lawyers, and engineers are considered professionals because of their expertise, college education, and special **credentials** (a letter or certificate given to a person to show that he/she has the right to exercise a certain authority) such as **licenses** (a credential from a state agency awarding legal permission to practice to a person who meets preestablished qualifications) and **certifications** (a credential from a state agency or a professional association awarding permission to use a special professional title to a person who meets preestablished competency standards). But truck drivers, hair stylists, and photographers consider themselves professionals too, as do bankers, insurance underwriters, and investment counselors. Exactly what is a professional and who is qualified to be one?

Occupations are sometimes divided into “professional” and “nonprofessional” categories based on criteria such as:

- unique and exclusive **scope of practice** (boundaries that determine what a worker may and may not do as part of his or her job)
- minimum educational standards and **accreditation** (certified as having met set standards) of educational programs
- minimum standards for entry into practice
- required credentials such as licenses or certifications
- **professional associations** (organizations composed of people from the same occupation) with codes of ethics and **competence** (possessing necessary knowledge and skills for a given occupation or task) standards.

When we apply these criteria to the health care workforce, then doctors, registered nurses, pharmacists, physical therapists, medical assistants, surgical technologists, dental assistants, radiographers, and the like are all classified as professionals. But that leaves other types of health care workers such as insurance processors, food service workers, housekeepers, and equipment repair technicians in the nonprofessional classification. Not making the list of professionals can be demeaning to people who work hard and make their jobs a top priority in their lives.

So in health care it’s important to acknowledge another set of criteria that gives all health care workers the opportunity to be viewed as professionals whether they provide direct patient care or function in a support role behind the scenes: It’s not *the job you do* that makes you a professional, it’s *how you do your job* that counts.

Every health care worker has the opportunity—and the obligation—to strive for professional recognition. So regardless of how other people may classify your job as professional or nonprofessional, always remember that it’s what you contribute in the workplace that really matters.

Professional recognition isn’t something that’s automatically bestowed upon a person when he or she completes an educational program, obtains a degree or certificate, or secures a license to practice. It’s not dependent on a person’s socioeconomic status, income, age, gender, race, job title, or position within the **hierarchy** (a group of people or units arranged by rank) of an organization. After all, we’ve all known people with college degrees, special credentials, and impressive job titles who don’t behave in a professional manner.

Recognition as a health care professional is something that has to be earned—a **reputation** (a person’s character, values, and behavior as viewed by others) that’s developed and maintained each and every day you come to work. Professionalism is a state of mind, a way of “being,” “knowing,” and “doing” that sets you apart from others. It gives direction to how you look, think, and act. It brings together who you are as a person, what you value, how you treat other people, what you contribute in the workplace, and how seriously you take your job. Professionals don’t just work to earn a paycheck. Income is important, but professionals view their work as a source of pride and a reflection of the role they play in society.

If you’re serious about a career in health care, viewing yourself as a professional and being recognized as such by other people will be a major key to your success. Professionalism is something every organization looks for in its employees. How can you spot a health care professional when you see one? It’s easy.

Health care professionals are good at what they do—and they like doing it. They enjoy helping others and knowing they’ve made a difference. Professionals “have their act together”—and it shows. They set high standards for their performance and achieve them. They see the “big picture” in health care and know where they fit in. Professionals care about quality and how to improve it. They treat everyone they meet with **dignity** (worth, merit, honor) and **respect** (a feeling or showing of honor or esteem toward another). They continually strive to grow and to learn.

Spotting a health care professional may be easy—but becoming one yourself is another matter. It’s something you have to concentrate on every day—but it’s worth it. To *be* a professional, you must *feel like* a professional. In our society, the amount of education a person has and what he or she does for a living have become important contributors to an individual’s **self-esteem** (belief in oneself; self-respect) and sense of **self-worth** (a sense of one’s own importance and value). *What we do* has become *who we are*. When you graduate from an educational program, earn a degree, or obtain a license or certification, you experience the exhilaration of knowing you’ve accomplished something worthwhile. Being recognized by others as a professional brings value and meaning to your efforts. It reminds you that what you do really counts. This is true whether you care for patients, process specimens, prepare meals, clean public areas, or work in any one of hundreds of different health care jobs. It’s also true whether you work in a hospital, physician office, dental practice, clinic, rehab facility, or some other type of health care organization. No matter what your role involves, how you view your work and how you approach it can have a tremendous impact on your own life as well as on the lives of those you serve.



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Why Health Care Needs Professionals

When you are sick or injured, health care can become a basic need for survival. Each year, millions of Americans receive health services in doctors' offices, hospitals, clinics, mental health facilities, and in their homes. Patients rely on health care professionals to provide affordable, state-of-the-art **diagnostic** (deciding the nature of a disease or condition) and **therapeutic** (an activity or method of treating or curing a disease or condition) procedures to help them overcome illness, injury, and other abnormalities that impact their health and quality of life.

But as you will learn in Chapter One, health care is a business, too. Finding ways to provide health care for more patients, using fewer resources, while achieving better outcomes has become a major challenge for health care **providers** (those who perform or enable a service such as a doctor, health care worker, or health care organization) and **payers** (a person or group that covers the expense of received goods or services). Meeting these challenges requires a cadre of health care workers who are committed to quality care, customer service, and cost effectiveness. People who fail to take a professional approach to their work are often late, absent, unreliable, and sloppy. Their actions may endanger patient care, customer service, safety, and the efficient use of limited resources.

Working in health care requires special skills and an **attitude** (a manner of acting, feeling, or thinking that shows one's disposition or opinion) that supports service to others. Patients seek health care services during some of the most vulnerable times in their lives, when they're sick, injured, and "at their worst." Each patient-worker interaction must build confidence and **trust** (confidence in the honesty, integrity, and reliability of another person). The decisions and actions of those who care for patients, or those who work behind the scenes to support the efforts of **caregivers** (health care workers who provide direct, hands-on patient care), can have an immediate and lasting impact.

The Importance of Every Job and Every Worker

Regardless of what type of job you are preparing for, you will play an important role in health care, because every job and every worker is important. Let's face reality—if a job weren't important it wouldn't exist. Everyone knows that the roles of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and physical therapists, for example, are important. But patients and the general public may not be as familiar with the roles of other caregivers such as medical assistants, radiographers, EKG technicians, nuclear medicine technologists, occupational therapists, and sonographers, just to name a few. People who work in support roles, often behind the scenes, may be even less known to patients and the general public. This includes billing clerks, instrument technicians, biomedical engineers, research assistants, and social workers whose roles are also vital. Depending on how you add them up, there are several hundred different jobs in health care organizations and they are all important. Large urban hospitals and medical centers employ so many different types of workers they begin to resemble small towns.

If your job will involve direct patient care, it should be obvious that professionalism is important. The same holds true with other jobs where workers interact directly with visitors, guests, and **vendors** (a person or company with whom your company does business) such as customer service agents, telephone operators, purchasing agents, and billing clerks. But what about the large percentage of health care workers in support roles

behind the scenes? Is professionalism really important in those jobs, too? What might happen if environmental services workers (housekeepers) miscalculated the dilution of an antiseptic cleaning fluid or used the wrong floor wax in a busy hallway? What if food service workers put the wrong items on a special-diet patient tray or spilled hot grease near an open flame in the kitchen? What if central service technicians failed to replace outdated stock or operated sterilizers at the wrong temperature?

It should be obvious that professionalism is vital in every job. Your challenge is to pull together the mixture of knowledge, skills, compassion, and commitment required to make you the very best employee you can possibly be. If you can meet this challenge every day on the job, then you've earned the privilege of being recognized as a health care professional. Nothing less is acceptable.

The information in this text will help guide your journey to professional recognition. It's important to start developing your reputation now while you are still a student. Apply yourself, take your studies seriously, learn to manage your time, and hone your communication skills. Make thoughtful decisions, encourage and support your fellow classmates, and find ways to balance the priorities in your life. Remember that everything that you hear, observe, learn, and experience will be important at some point in your health career. If your educational program includes a **practicum** (a "real-life" learning experience obtained through working on-site in a health care facility while enrolled as a student; also known as a clinical, an externship, an internship, a hands-on experience, or the like), you'll be interacting with health care workers, physicians, and patients to gain hands-on experience even before you graduate.

Expect some changes along the way, plan to continue your learning after you've graduated from school, and always strive to do your very best. You and the patients will someday serve deserve nothing less.

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Professionalism in Health Care

A Primer for Career Success

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The Health Care Industry and Your Role

1



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In a world that is constantly changing, there is no one subject or set of subjects that will serve you for the foreseeable future, let alone for the rest of your life. The most important skill to acquire now is learning how to learn.

John Naisbitt, international best-selling author

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

Having completed this chapter, you will be able to:

- List four benefits of working in the health care industry.
- Explain the difference between *soft skills* and *hard skills*.
- List two reasons why health care workers must be aware of current trends and issues in the health care industry.
- List three reasons why health care is expensive and the costs continue to rise.
- Identify two ways that the Baby Boomer population will impact the health care industry.
- Describe two controversial issues associated with health care reform.
- Define *continuous quality improvement*.
- List two quality improvement goals.
- Define *sentinel event*.
- Explain the connection between sentinel events and patient safety.
- Identify two trends in the supply and demand of health care workers.
- List two advantages of electronic health records.
- Define *social media*.
- Give two examples of social media sites.

KEY TERMS

accountability	continuous quality improvement (CQI)	individual mandate	perspective
accountable care organizations	digital communication	infant mortality rate	preexisting condition
acute	disabled	intelligence quotient (IQ)	prenatal
advanced practice providers (APPs)	discipline	interpersonal skills	preventive
adverse effects	diverse	Lean Sigma	primary care
alternative medicine	electronic health record (EHR)	legibility	process
apps	emoji	life expectancy	readmission
Baby Boomers	emotional intelligence quotient (EQ)	Medicaid	root cause
baseline data	empowered	medical homes	sentinel event
blog	error	Medicare	single-payer system
breach	gatekeepers	metrics	smartphones
chronic	geriatric	mistake	social media
cognition	gross domestic product (GDP)	multiskilled	soft skills
complementary medicine	hard skills	obese	specialists
confidentiality	health care exchanges	outcome data	staffing level
consumers	hospice services	out-of-pocket expense	stakeholders
continuity		palliative care	traits
		people skills	transferable skills
		personality	work ethic

Working in Health Care

Whether you are preparing for your first job or gaining the knowledge and skills you need for career advancement, you've made a good decision choosing a health care occupation. Working in health care offers lots of benefits and opportunities.

Health care employs about 10% of all American workers. Job opportunities both now and in the future appear excellent. While the recent recession eliminated millions of jobs throughout the United States, jobs in the health care sector grew steadily. In fact, the past 14 years have seen unprecedented job growth in health care. Thirteen of the 20 fastest-growing occupations in the United States are in health care and this trend is likely to continue due to the rapid growth of the elderly population, expansion of health care information technology, and increases in the rates of **obese** (weighing more than 20% above a person's ideal weight) and **disabled** (having a condition that damages or limits a person's physical or mental abilities) Americans. Health care is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the U.S. economy. It's projected to generate more than 4 million new jobs between 2012 and 2022—more than any other industry.

The health care industry offers **diverse** (differing; varied) employment opportunities, ranging from small-town physician practices with one medical assistant to large, urban academic medical centers and health systems employing thousands of workers. Many employers offer flexible work schedules and most provide valuable benefits such as health and life insurance, paid vacation time and holidays, tuition assistance, and a retirement plan.

With so many different occupations from which to choose, health care workers have an abundance of opportunities for career advancement. You can:

- Earn advanced degrees and additional professional certifications
- Move up the ladder in your original **discipline** (a branch of knowledge or learning such as nursing, medical assisting, surgical technology, and so forth)
- Become **multiskilled** (cross-trained to perform more than one function, possibly in more than one discipline)
- Apply your **transferable skills** (skills acquired in one job that are applicable in another job) to train in a different discipline
- Advance into leadership, teaching, sales, or research jobs

One of the best benefits of working in health care is the opportunity to improve the quality of people’s lives. As mentioned in the Introduction, when you are sick or injured, health care can become a basic need for survival. People seek health care services during some of the most vulnerable times in their lives. Premature babies struggle to survive, injured athletes strive to regain strength, people with **acute** (severe but of short or limited duration) and **chronic** (occurring frequently over a long period of time) ailments try to lead normal lives, and terminally ill patients face end-of-life decisions. Health care workers are at their patients’ sides from cradle to grave, providing crucial diagnostic and therapeutic procedures, compassionate care, and helpful encouragement and support. It’s a privilege to work in health care and touch the lives of everyone you serve.

As a service industry, health care requires superb **people skills**, also known as **soft skills** (personality characteristics that enhance one’s ability to interact effectively with other people). Your **personality** (distinctive qualities of a person; patterns of behavior and attitudes) and your **interpersonal skills** (the ability to interact with other people) enhance your relationships, job performance, and career prospects. Sometimes referred to as your **emotional intelligence quotient (EQ)** (the ability to perceive, assess, and manage your own emotions and other people’s emotions), soft skills relate more to *who you are* than *what you know*—your **intelligence quotient (IQ)** (the mental ability to learn and understand). Once you’ve graduated from your educational program and obtained credentials to practice, employers will assume you are competent to perform the hands-on, technical, **hard skills** duties of your job. Hard skills can be learned and improved over time, but soft skills are part of your personality and much more difficult to acquire and change. Employers are increasingly screening, hiring, paying, and promoting for soft skills to ensure that their employees work harmoniously with other people.

This book focuses on the soft skills you need to achieve success in health care. The following chapters discuss:

- **Work ethic** (attitudes and behaviors that support good work performance)
- Personal and character **traits** (characteristics or qualities related to one’s personality)
- Relationships and communication skills
- Working with patients and customer service
- Professionalism and your personal life
- The practicum experience
- Employment and career advancement.

Before addressing these topics, we must first focus on another important step in preparing for a role in health care: learning as much as you can about the industry’s current trends and issues. As a health care worker, you’ll be part of the nation’s fastest-growing industry.



Figure 1-1 Patient checking in at registration (Tyler Olson/Shutterstock)

CONSIDER THIS

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES

More than 20 years after passing the Americans with Disabilities Act, research shows that more than 57 million people, nearly one out of every five American adults, has a disability. Disabilities include difficulty with vision, mobility, **cognition** (knowing, understanding), self-care, and independent living. The highest rates of disabilities are among adults with the lowest levels of education, income, and employment. People at least 80 years of age are eight times more likely to become disabled than people 15 years or younger. About 40% of disabled people ages 21–64 are employed, versus 79% of people who aren't disabled.

About 8 million people have vision problems, 2 million of whom are blind. More than 7 million people have difficulty hearing and 5.6 million use hearing aids. More than 30 million people report difficulty walking or climbing stairs, with many of them relying on canes, crutches, wheelchairs, and walkers. Seven million adults suffer with depression or anxiety issues that interfere with their normal daily activities.

As more Americans become older, the number of patients requiring medical care for disabilities will continue to rise, placing an even greater strain on the U.S. health care system.

- How much do you know about the health care industry?
- Are you up to speed with current topics and where health care is headed?
- Do you know enough about local and national health care issues to discuss them intelligently with other people?

Everyone is affected by the health care industry and many Americans have opinions about what's wrong with health care and how to fix it. This is especially true today because health care has become very expensive. All Americans, and especially health care workers, need to be actively involved in finding ways to make improvements.

If you want to be viewed as a health care professional, you need to be aware of what's going on in your industry. This doesn't mean you have to know everything about all of the issues under debate. But you do need to keep up with current trends and issues and consider how they might

impact your job, your patients, your personal health, and your career. Be on the lookout for information from a variety of sources. Read articles about health care and watch the news for special programs about health care issues. Attend health care seminars and conferences when you get the opportunity and become active in your discipline's professional organizations. Speak with people who are current on the latest trends and join in conversations to discuss the issues.

By deciding to work in health care, you have chosen an industry like no other.

- Workers are dealing with life and death situations on a daily basis, 24/7/365.
- Things are changing rapidly; new devices, drugs, and medical procedures are under development every day.
- Hospitals and doctors are forming networks, restructuring organizations, and redesigning jobs and job duties.
- Population trends, especially the aging of **Baby Boomers** (people born in the United States between 1946 and 1964), are driving major changes in health care.
- An insufficient supply of doctors and health care workers in rural areas and economically depressed urban areas are leaving large segments of the population medically underserved.

When you consider all of these factors, it becomes clear that change is the name of the game in health care. It's a fast-moving train. You need to climb onboard or risk being left behind. You must know what's going on and where things appear to be headed, so you can be well informed and prepared for the future ahead.

Health care has become one of the most controversial industries in recent years, with new laws and regulations. What's the best way to retool our health care system so that everyone who needs health care can access medical services at an affordable cost? Health care is a business. As a health care professional, it's important to know about the business side of your industry and where you fit in.

TRENDS AND ISSUES

MULTIPLE CHRONIC DISEASES ON THE RISE

Approximately two-thirds of American older adults have more than one chronic disease and about 15% of them (4 million people) have at least six chronic conditions. Chronic diseases include diabetes, heart disease, depression, asthma, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, arthritis, and Alzheimer's disease. More than 41% of **Medicare** (a government program that provides health care primarily for people age 65 and older) funding is spent on seniors who are much sicker than those of past generations. **Life expectancy** (the statistical number of years of life remaining at any given age) is longer for today's seniors, so many of them will struggle with their diseases for decades to come, placing a major strain on Medicare funding.

Consider these statistics:

- Every day about 10,000 people reach age 65 and become eligible for Medicare.
- Seniors with five or more chronic ailments see about 13 doctors and take about 50 prescription drugs over a year's time.
- The average cost of caring for a patient with one chronic disease is three times greater than caring for a patient with no chronic disease.
- The cost of caring for a patient with five or more chronic diseases is 15 times more than caring for a patient with no chronic disease.
- One billion dollars in Medicare funding was spent on just 10,000 older patients in 2010.
- Seventy-five percent of the most expensive Medicare cases involve Alzheimer's disease.

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- Alzheimer’s is the most difficult and expensive disease to treat because it complicates other conditions and requires long-term care.
- Nursing home care and related expenses can add up to \$100,000 a year per person.

Helping patients with multiple chronic diseases manage their prescriptions and coordinate care among a dozen doctors presents an enormous challenge. Hospitals are responding by employing care coordinators and redesigning areas of the ER for seniors. As patients become sicker, the goal is to intervene quickly and provide them with helpful services without admitting them to the hospital. When patients require hospitalization, teams of people from area doctor’s offices, rehab facilities, home care agencies, pharmacies, and nursing homes meet to discuss cases and coordinate discharge procedures so that details don’t fall through the cracks. This type of teamwork, communication, and coordination will become more common in the future as an effective approach to helping seniors manage multiple chronic diseases.

Health Care as a Business

Most of what you learn here relates to working in a patient care environment—the service side of the health care industry. But understanding the business side of health care is very important, too. Health care is expensive, it’s a necessity of life, and it affects everyone including **consumers** (purchasers or users of a product or service), taxpayers, employers, businesses, government, and other **stakeholders** (people with a keen interest in a project or organization; may be end-users of a product or service). Consider the following:

- As patients, everyone is a consumer of health care. When the need arises, consumers want the best health care available regardless of the cost.
- As taxpayers, everyone pays for health care through programs such as Medicare and **Medicaid** (a government program that provides health care for low-income people and families and for those with certain disabilities).
- The United States spends about \$2.5 trillion per year (about \$8,500 per person) on health care, significantly more than any other developed nation, and the cost is rising.
- Unpaid medical bills account for about 60% of all personal bankruptcies in the United States.
- Health care costs account for about 20% of the nation’s **gross domestic product** (GDP; the total market value of all goods and services produced in one year) and is rising.

So when it comes to health care, everyone is a stakeholder with concerns and opinions to voice.

Providing health care for everyone who needs it at a reasonable expense is an enormous challenge. The cost of health care in the United States is growing faster than the cost of most other goods and services. Cost increases result from:

- The need to recruit, pay, and retain highly competent doctors and health professionals
- Medical research to develop new drugs, devices, and procedures
- The rising cost of medical equipment, supplies, and utilities
- Building construction, remodeling, and maintenance
- The expense of training future doctors, nurses, and other health professionals.

As the cost of health care increases, Americans continue to debate the best way to pay for it. People who have health insurance typically receive coverage through their employer, a government program such as Medicare or Medicaid, or an individual or group policy. Each patient has a **primary care** doctor who provides the initial or basic medical care needed. The primary care doctor then refers the patient to a variety of **specialists** (people who are devoted to a particular

occupation or branch of study) depending on the additional services required. With primary care doctors acting as **gatekeepers** (people who monitor the actions of other people and/or control access to something), the goal is to:

- Encourage **preventive** services (actions taken to avoid contracting a medical condition) such as vaccinations, flu shots, and health screenings
- Provide medical care in the least expensive settings such as doctors' offices, outpatient clinics, and the patient's home
- Avoid unnecessary or duplicate tests and treatments
- Coordinate services from different providers to ensure **continuity** (the quality of being continuous, uninterrupted, and connected) in care and the best outcomes for the patient.

Controlling the cost of health care is just one of the problems. Ensuring adequate access to health care services is also an issue. Millions of Americans don't have health insurance or a primary care doctor. They go without medical care or rely on hospital emergency departments where the cost of caring for patients is very high. They go without prescription drugs, which makes their conditions more difficult and expensive to treat in the long run. Pregnant women forego **prenatal** (before birth) care, which can cause major problems later on.

When patients are unable (or unwilling) to pay their medical bills, the providers must write off the loss as charity care or unreimbursed services. Since hospitals and doctors have to cover their expenses to remain in business, this loss of income drives up the cost for other patients who do have health insurance and who do pay their bills.

The lack of doctors and medical facilities in rural areas and in medically underserved urban areas also limits access to health care services for many Americans. Many doctors and health care professionals prefer to live and work in attractive urban areas, making it difficult to recruit and retain a sufficient labor supply in other parts of the country.

Before examining some of the new laws and current efforts to improve America's health care system, let's examine what to expect as Baby Boomers age and place increased demands on the industry.

BY THE NUMBERS

OBESITY IN AMERICA

At a cost of \$147–\$210 billion per year, obesity has become a major concern in the health of Americans. Obesity leads to several types of preventable chronic diseases and life-threatening conditions including type 2 diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, heart disease and stroke, and obesity-related cancer. More than 75% of patients with hypertension and a third of cancer deaths can be linked to insufficient physical activity and/or obesity. In 1994, 7.8 million people were diagnosed with diabetes. By 2014 that number had grown to almost 26 million. Today, nearly 40% of people ages 40–59 are obese.

Obesity rates vary from state to state. Every state has an obesity rate above 20%, and 23 states have rates at 25% or more. Adult obesity is highest in Mississippi and West Virginia at 35% while Colorado has the lowest rate at 21%. States with the highest rates are in the South or the Midwest. States in the Northeast and West have the lowest rates. Between 2012 and 2013, six states had sharp increases in their obesity rates: Alaska, Delaware, Idaho, New Jersey, Tennessee, and Wyoming.

As of 2013, nearly 14% of high school students were obese and almost 17% were overweight. The rates were highest in Kentucky at 18% and lowest in Utah at just above 6%. Obesity rates among children ages 10–17 range from about 10% in Oregon to almost 22% in Mississippi.

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Obese adults spend 42% more on direct health care costs than nonobese patients. Obesity is associated with lower productivity at work, increased number of sick days, and higher medical claims. Reducing obesity and related chronic conditions will likely become a high priority in the future. Although obesity rates appear to be stabilizing somewhat, it's projected that by the year 2030 about 42% of Americans will be obese, seeking treatment in oncology, cardiology, and primary care offices throughout the country.



Figure 1-2 Obese patient being assessed by his doctor (*PathDoc/Shutterstock*)

Impact of the Baby Boomer Population

The older population in the United States is growing rapidly due to the aging of the Baby Boomer population—the 78 million people born between the years 1946 and 1964. Here are some things to consider about this large population:

- The over-65 population will almost double in the coming years.
- The first Baby Boomer reached 64 in 2010; it will take another 21 years for the last one to reach that milestone.
- When compared with previous generations, Baby Boomers have higher education levels, use more online Internet resources, and are more directly involved in their health care.
- Almost 20% of Baby Boomers are minorities, requiring more attention to cultural differences.
- Baby Boomers possess 75% of the nation's disposable income but worry about covering their health care and retirement expenses.
- Thanks to joint replacements and other medical advancements, Baby Boomers are more physically active than seniors in the past and suffer from fewer disabilities.
- Seventy percent of baby boomers subscribe to **complementary medicine** (combining alternative medical approaches with traditional medical practices) and/or **alternative medicine** (healing arts that are not part of traditional medical practice in the United States) such as massage therapy, chiropractic care, meditation, and acupuncture.



Figure 1-3 Baby Boomer patient consulting with her nurse practitioner (*Monkey Business Images/Shutterstock*)

Baby Boomers are predicted to have an unprecedented long-term impact on the health care industry, consuming far more medical services than any older population in the past. Baby Boomers will live longer than their predecessors. In fact, half of all of the people who have ever lived to age 65 are alive today. By the year 2030, 6 out of 10 seniors will have at least one chronic condition, 1 out of 3 will be considered obese, 1 out of 4 will have diabetes, and 1 out of 2 will be living with arthritis. More than 25% of the total health care spending for each patient occurs in the final years of his or her life. By the year 2030, 4 out of 10 adult visits to doctors' offices will be baby boomers, 55 million lab tests per year will be needed for diabetic seniors, eight times more knee replacements will be performed than today, and 4 million more emergency department visits will be logged than today.

Efforts are already underway to prepare for the impact of this large patient population. New medicines, monitoring equipment, and surgical techniques are in development. With new technology, seniors will be able to monitor more of their conditions from home and communicate remotely with physicians and specialists. Hospitals are remodeling to offer the more personalized care and convenience that baby boomers expect, including more private rooms with sound-reduction materials and in-room computers for patient use.

These are just a few examples of how health care providers are preparing for the arrival of this large population of older patients. But much more needs to be done to improve the nation's health care system for all patients.

Improving the Nation's Health Care System

As large numbers of Baby Boomers interact more frequently with the health care system, they will likely become even more engaged in improvement efforts. In doing so, they will join the increasing number of lawmakers, employers, business leaders, providers, consumers, insurance companies, drug manufacturers, and other groups involved in health care reform. There's no question that the United States has one of the best health care systems in the world, but Americans lag behind other countries in life expectancy, **infant mortality rate** (the number of infants that die during the first year of life), preventive care, and other common measures of health and well-being. Studies