



Cardiovascular Nursing

What is a cardiovascular nurse?

A cardiovascular nurse can work in several different capacities within cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevention and management, from monitoring patients with coronary heart disease and heart failure, to developing and managing treatment options for both primary and secondary prevention, to assisting physicians with invasive cardiovascular procedures.

Where do they work?

Cardiovascular nurses work in a wide array of settings including physician practices, outpatient clinics, hospitals, cardiac rehabilitation programs, home health, occupational health settings, and health maintenance organizations (HMOs), as well as in research settings, colleges and universities, and public health settings.

What is the role of a cardiovascular nurse?

A cardiovascular nurse focuses on the assessment, treatment and education of patients with CVD or those at risk for CVD. These patients include those who have risk factors for CVD including cholesterol disorders, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, family history and/or tobacco addiction. Cardiovascular nurses aim to reduce these patients' risk of a first or subsequent cardiac event.

What makes a cardiovascular nurse different from other nurses?

A cardiovascular nurse has specialty knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of the heart and related systems, including interpretation of electrocardiographic rhythms and other cardiac specific diagnostic and lab tests. Preventive cardiovascular nurses have detailed knowledge and expertise in CVD risk factor assessment, guidelines and treatments. Many nurses also have specialized training in exercise testing and lipid abnormalities, hypertension and diabetes management. Additionally, they are able to help patients with dietary issues, weight loss, exercise and smoking cessation. Their focus is to initiate both lifestyle and pharmacological treatment and to ensure consistent follow-up and treatment success.

What are the benefits for a patient from working with a cardiovascular nurse?

The cardiovascular nurse is skilled in assessment, counseling, education and management of patients either at risk for developing CVD or with diagnosed CVD. These skills are used by cardiovascular nurses in hospital, clinical and cardiac rehabilitation settings. Assessing and initiating treatment is only part of the role of the cardiovascular nurse. Consistent follow-up, treating patients to goal, and continuing to emphasize lifestyle changes are as important. Cardiovascular nurses understand the importance of a team effort and the application of behavior change principles in order to reduce patients' CV risk. For this reason, patients treated by a cardiovascular nurse receive optimal treatment and care by both a nurse and physician who are skilled in the diagnosis and treatment of CVD.



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Are there different types of cardiovascular nurses?

Within cardiovascular nursing there are different subspecialties which cardiovascular nurses can pursue, including the acute care cardiovascular nurses, cardiovascular/primary care nurses, interventional cardiovascular nurses, nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists.

Acute/Critical Care Cardiovascular Nurse

Acute care cardiovascular nurses work with patients diagnosed with a variety of cardiovascular diseases (CVD) including congestive heart failure (CHF), coronary artery disease, vascular disease, hypertension and dysrhythmias. This is generally in a hospital intensive care or step-down care unit. Acute care cardiovascular nurses perform physical assessments, administer and monitor cardiovascular medications/treatments, follow up on laboratory and diagnostic tests and work with other nurses and attending physicians in the care of patients with CVD. The acute care cardiovascular nurse plays an important role in prevention when a patient is ready to be discharged, making sure that guidelines for secondary prevention are followed and patients have been prescribed medications known to help reduce recurring events, as well as in initiating patient education.

Cardiovascular/Primary Care Nurse

These cardiovascular nurses work in non-acute settings such as physician offices, cardiovascular risk reduction clinics, health maintenance organizations (HMOs), home health care, cardiac rehabilitation settings and public health settings to help in the overall prevention and treatment of CVD. In addition to providing preventive education, these nurses provide risk factor assessment, management and follow-up for both primary and secondary prevention. They work with nurse practitioners, physicians and other nurses to provide patient education, as well as follow-up on laboratory values and other risk factors as part of a team effort to get patients to goal.

Interventional and Device Cardiovascular Nurse

Interventional cardiovascular nurses assist physicians with patients undergoing a cardiovascular interventional procedure such as percutaneous transluminal coronary angioplasty (PTCA) and stent placements, as well as electrophysiology studies that involve the diagnosis and treatment of arrhythmias. Device nurses are also involved in the on-going trans-telephonic and outpatient monitoring of pacemaker and defibrillator patients.

Nurse Practitioners and Clinical Nurse Specialists

Nurse practitioners and Clinical Nurse Specialists, also called Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs), have graduate degrees and are board certified by a national nursing organization. Cardiovascular APNs work in acute or outpatient settings as well as in preventive cardiology or risk reduction clinics. They are instrumental in the assessment, management, and follow-up of high-risk patients and patients with known CVD. They have special training in patient assessment and providing treatment plans for patients, keeping abreast of the latest guidelines for optimal treatment and follow-up.