

# Exploring Healthcare Volunteering

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT CERTIFICATION



Many roles in healthcare require specific certifications. Before deciding on a certification, students interested in healthcare volunteering should first reflect on their **goals**. Consider whether you're **passionate about medical decision-making** or if you'd prefer exposure to clinical environments **without significant decision-making responsibility**. Medical decision-making refers to determining specific interventions based on assessment findings, often only with written guidance. Often, these decisions occur in a chaotic and fast-paced environment, thus an individual relies heavily on their training and ability to perform under pressure.

If you're interested in the medical decision-making aspect of clinical volunteering, one option to consider is an **Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)** program.

If you're more interested in assisting within clinical settings without direct medical decision-making, certifications such as **Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)**, **phlebotomy licensure**, or **Patient Care Technician (PCT)** might be more suitable.

## *Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)*

- **Duration:** 3 to 12 months; 150-250 hours of training
- **Certification:** Completion of the **National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT)** exam, which includes a computer-based adaptive exam for national certification, along with approximately 10 patient contacts (through ER rotations or ambulance shifts) and a psychomotor (hands-on) practical exam. State-based licensure requirements vary, but many require holding an NREMT certification.
- **Cost:** ~\$0-\$3,000
- **Role:** EMTs are responsible for direct patient assessments and interventions in pre-hospital settings. This includes making medical decisions in emergency situations, under written guidance (protocols) from a physician.
- **Job Opportunities:** EMTs can work on ambulances (public 911 response or private transport), at public events like concerts, or in emergency departments.

**Tip:** For those interested in EMT training, consider reaching out to your local fire department for potential free courses and hands-on training. Other options include programs at community colleges, universities like UR or VCU, or private companies such as Associates in Emergency Care. Scholarships are available through the **Virginia Office of Emergency Medical Services (VAOMES)**, especially for minority students, though they may require a post-certification volunteering commitment.

## ***Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)***

- **Duration:** 1 to 3 months; 120-150 hours of training
- **Certification:** Completion of state-specific requirements
- **Cost:** ~\$1,000
- **Role:** CNAs assist patients with daily living activities like bathing, dressing, and feeding. They do not perform direct medical interventions but may take vital signs.
- **Job Opportunities:** CNAs can work in nursing homes, hospitals, and home health settings.

## ***Phlebotomy Licensure***

- **Duration:** 3 to 8 months; 40-80 hours of training
- **Certification:** Completion of state-specific requirements
- **Cost:** ~\$1,000
- **Role:** Phlebotomists focus on collecting blood samples and other lab specimens. They do not generally perform other medical interventions.
- **Job Opportunities:** Phlebotomists can work in outpatient labs or within hospital settings.

## ***Patient Care Technician (PCT)***

- **Duration:** 4 to 12 months; hours of training vary on program selected
- **Certification:** Completion of state-specific requirements
- **Cost:** ~\$1,000-\$3,000
- **Role:** PCTs provide support similar to CNAs but may have additional responsibilities, depending on the facility. They do not have medical decision-making authority.
- **Job Opportunities:** Similar to CNAs, with some additional flexibility based on the healthcare facility.

### ***Additional Information on Certification Programs***

Many hospitals hire EMTs, CNAs, and PCTs as technicians. Responsibilities may include learning advanced procedures like IV insertions, EKGs, and blood draws, depending on the facility.

Many local healthcare and public health non-profit organizations prefer volunteers who have a certification, but certification is not required for every volunteering role. Additionally, many community organizations look for students who have work experience with their respective certification, not just the certification itself.

For CNA, PCT, and phlebotomy certifications, consider employer-sponsored programs, where companies cover certification costs in exchange for a work commitment. These programs are also available at community colleges and through private providers.

## ***Need Funding Support?***

**Career Opportunity Fund:** allows students access to career development opportunities during their career exploration and job search processes. Max. of \$250 for professional clothing, travel expenses, or testing fees.

**UR EMT Certification:** cost of UR class and book are covered by UR for students who join UREMS and commit to a one-year minimum term working for UREMS after passing their national test.

**Virginia EMS Scholarship Program:** provides funding to individuals pursuing EMT, AEMT, and paramedic certifications in Virginia.

**Questions?** Contact the CCE's Healthcare Program Associate (contact information available on the [Healthcare & Public Health](#) webpage) or [spidersengage@richmond.edu](mailto:spidersengage@richmond.edu).