

HEALTH Q&A

Physical therapy assistant is hot job

Q: I was particularly interested in an article in Sunday's paper [Feb. 28] about health-care jobs. I've been considering going back to school to become a physical therapy assistant. The



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biggest roadblock I've run across is that there are no schools here in central Virginia that offer this program.

Answer: Physical therapist assistant jobs are expected to be in high demand during the next decade.

The Virginia Board of Physical Therapy licenses physical therapists and physical therapist assistants.

General requirements to be licensed as a physical therapist assistant include these:

- You must:
- be 18 or older;
- be a graduate of a two-

year college-level education program for physical therapist assistants acceptable to the physical therapy board; and

- earn a passing score on an examination approved by the physical therapy board.

The Virginia Department of Health Professions does not regulate or accredit the schools that offer physical therapy education.

Potential students are referred to the American Physical Therapy Association for information on accredited education programs.

Accredited physical therapist assistant programs are offered in Virginia at: Jefferson College of Health Sciences in Roanoke; Medical Careers Institute in Newport News; Northern Virginia Community College in Springfield; Tidewater Community College in Virginia Beach; and Wytheville Community College in Wytheville.

The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, which approves curricula for higher education degree programs, lists South University's location in the Richmond area as having a physical therapy assistant program.

The privately run school opened a second Virginia lo-

cation in West Broad Village last fall.

"While I don't have any specifics, we plan to add it to our program offering in Richmond in the future," said Heather R. Askew, South University's director of communications, in an e-mail.

A spokesman at Medical Careers Institute said he could not disclose any plans to offer a Richmond-area physical therapist assistant program.

Median annual salary for physical therapist assistants was \$46,140 in 2008, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. The top 10 percent earned more than \$63,830 annually.

They work in a variety of places. Highest paid were those working for home health-care agencies, nursing-care facilities, hospitals and private offices.

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