

# Health Career Observer



The Official Newsletter of the WNY R-AHEC

January, 2025

## Primary Care Physician (PCP)

Primary care physicians (PCPs) are pivotal in healthcare, providing comprehensive and continuous care to patients of all ages. They perform routine check-ups, preventive care, and manage both acute and chronic illnesses. PCPs also coordinate care among specialists and educate patients about their health conditions and treatments. PCPs are usually a patient's first point of contact in the healthcare system. They have the privilege to establish long-term connections with patients and advocate for their patient panel to make sure they are receiving the care they need. Depending on the provider they also have opportunities to do in-office procedures as well.

**Average Annual Pay: \$250,000-275,000: PCP salaries have increased 10% in the last 5 years, and salaries will continue to rise as demand for PCPs grow further.**



*"I think getting the opportunity to develop connections with patients is the best part of being in medicine..."*

**-Bailey Majtyka, Medical Student Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences**

## How Do I Become a Primary Care Physician?

**PROJECTED PCP  
JOB GROWTH  
RATE IS 7% FROM  
2018-2028.**

It is a long journey to become a PCP or any other doctor! Most applicants get their required coursework completed while pursuing a bachelor's degree in biology, chemistry, or other Pre-Med related degrees before applying for medical school. After medical school there is a residency match, and most PCPs will apply into Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, or Med-Peds residencies. PCPs must become licensed by completing their USMLE or COMLEX and must become certified with their residency-specific board exam. They are also required to go through continuous education and training in order to keep up with their specific requirements. For example, PCPs with a Family Medicine Certification will need to complete 200 CME hours and pass their recertification exam every 5 years.

## What Does a Primary Care Physician Do?

- ✓ Diagnose and monitor patients' health problems using both physical exam skills, communication skills, and labwork/imaging.
- ✓ Health maintenance visits, where you get to provide check-ups, preventive care, and education to patients.
- ✓ Referral to specialists when things are out of your wheelhouse, like surgery, complicated procedures, or more complicated health needs.
- ✓ Perform minor in-office procedures such as joint injections, biopsies, immunizations, EKGs, wound care, ultrasonography, and endoscopy.
- ✓ Advocacy for patients and the community to help promote better healthcare outcomes for your patient panel.
- ✓ Administrative tasks like note-writing, filling prescriptions, and insurance paperwork.



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## A Professional Account

**Bailey Maityka** a Third-Year Medical Student at Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences gives insight on primary care and the journey into medicine.

### What is the most rewarding part of your journey?

"I think getting the opportunity to develop connections with patients is the best part of being in medicine, whether you're going to be a surgeon, nurse, medical assistant, or imaging technician. Never underestimate the impact of your words or what you can accomplish in your role, no matter how small you may think your part of the team is. As a student thrown into different medical settings it's easy to dismiss yourself as being the 'bottom of the pecking order,' or 'just' the student. In reality, we have the most time on the team to get to know your patient. You can learn their values, their stories, and their goals to help know establish rapport with the person you're treating. Taking just a bit of time talking to patients goes a long way, for them to feel more comfortable, but also help make sure they're getting the care that would most benefit them and their lifestyles. It also makes it more enjoyable for us, because the patients are so thankful to have been seen and listened to as people, and not just as a patient with a disease to be treated."

### What is the most challenging?

"The most challenging part of my journey has been learning how to handle the intricacies of chronic illness. Unfortunately, not every patient will get better. Some disease processes can't be reversed once the damage is done. We do our best to manage the symptoms, but there are only so many tools in our arsenal. Realizing that we don't always have a magic bullet for a patient's disease can be a tough pill to swallow for both providers and patients. As a PCP you may have cared for these patients and known them personally for years. In some cases, you might have delivered their children or known their families, friends, and partners for as long as you have treated your patient. Balancing your professional expertise with providing the humanity and empathy these patients need, especially in difficult moments, can be challenging. Having goals of care discussions with these patients can be difficult, but it's crucial to ensure they receive the care they want and part of that is making sure families are aware of their options and preferences. Since these can be such big emotional investments, it is essential to take the time to care for yourself while managing a demanding schedule."

### What do you wish you knew starting this journey that you know now?

"There are many pathways into the medical field, and it's important to know that you don't have to become a doctor to make a significant impact. Many other roles in the medical field and various careers allow you to contribute positively to people's lives. Becoming a doctor, particularly a primary care physician, requires a significant commitment. The journey is long and filled with numerous challenges. Prospective doctors face many tests, substantial debt, and spend over a decade learning before they can practice independently. Additionally, there are many logistical hurdles, as each test, application, and interview demands considerable preparation time. While overcoming these obstacles can boost self-confidence, it's essential to develop good organizational skills and healthy habits. Practicing self-care, whether through reading, playing video games, or engaging in activities with friends and support systems, is crucial for maintaining the energy needed for studies and providing care to others. I think knowing better organizational strategies and knowing how to practice better self-care would have lowered the stress associated with this journey. Additionally, I wish I had known more about how to find good mentors earlier on in my journey. I had great mentors in college that made a world of difference in applying to medical school. They gave such great advice and feedback when I needed it. Their guidance helped me accomplish my goals."

### Anything else you want to share?

"As much work as this has been, it's been a lot of fun to learn as much as I have. I think developing an appreciation for the process of learning has made things easier and more manageable to work through each of these steps. I have been blessed to have had a great support system in my family, my partner, and all the friends I've made along the way. They make it easier to keep moving through this process and make the destination that much more desirable. I think any job in medicine, and especially as a PCP, can be a very rewarding career. It is well-suited to anyone that wants to make a difference in other people's lives. The rewarding nature of these careers and the amount of good that can be done day-to-day can make this a career that you will want to spend many years in, even with all of the obstacles you'll have to overcome."



Click on the image for information on a career as a PCP.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxsEGoNc9bl>



Click on the image for a professional account from a PCP.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ACBN5B6LzY>



For more information visit the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics  
<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/physicians-and-surgeons.htm>



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The Health Career Resource Guide features roughly 40 careers, health career information, and school and financial resources.