Introduction to Nurse Paralegal
What Are Nurse Paralegals?
A nurse paralegal is known as someone who works on healthcare law matters under the supervision of attorneys in a law firm or a law-related setting. Nurse paralegals are licensed or registered nurses as well as legal professionals. Having a nursing background allows them to bring their nursing and healthcare experience to the legal work environment. Nurse paralegals are not attorneys, as they are not licensed; nonetheless, they are an asset to the law firm in matters relating to healthcare lawsuits involving standards of care and medical protocols.

Nurse paralegals can sometimes be called nurse legal assistants, as they can assist attorneys and other legal professionals in the legal setting. The role a nurse paralegal plays and the knowledge they offer to the law firm is important for assisting in all matters pertaining to nursing, healthcare, and the law.

Areas of Practice:
- Medical and Nursing Malpractice
- Product Liability
- Workers’ Compensation
- Personal Injury
- Toxic Torts and Environment
- Negligence
- Any case where health, illness, or injury is an issue

Nurse Paralegals:
- Offer their professional skills to the law firm by reviewing and analyzing medical records and reporting on the same
- Identify and summarize medical treatments, complaints, injuries, and missing or time-sensitive medical documents
- Assist in preparation for trial, discovery requests, analysis of medical literature, and expert research
- Analyze billing to evaluate the strength of the medical evidence in cases of pre-existing or coexisting conditions
- Support the legal team by requesting, analyzing and summarizing medical records, while conducting research via the internet and using current research software

Additionally, nurse paralegals detect tampering and can recognize errors or omissions in medical records charts, offer assistance with demonstrative evidence, evaluate medical information, and provide professional nursing opinions regarding the causation of injuries and the assessment of damages to individuals. They interview witnesses under the direction of their attorney to help elicit additional evidence in various cases. Nurse paralegals also conduct medical research and educate the attorney about their results and other findings. They provide reports and other presentations to the attorney to help in what could be considered a tedious process for those without the professional legal expertise.
Why Become a Nurse Paralegal?

Nurse paralegal is a way to use your professional background, knowledge, and expertise in a new environment. The income potential is good, and the experience from working in a dedicated law firm can enhance the healthcare skills you currently possess, thus making a difference in the healthcare legal field.

Income Potential & Professional Rewards

Nurse paralegals have an income potential of $68,000 to $83,000 (www.payscale.com, 2017), depending on what part of the country you live in, how many years you have been working in the field, and how many hours you can work.

Money helps, but it isn’t everything. Once the nurse paralegal has a longstanding experience, they will often build a reputation of expertise and accuracy. Therefore, each day will introduce new challenges in the research of cases with unusual circumstances, or with large volumes of records that only an experienced healthcare professional with required legal background will be able to tackle with the appropriate legal precision.

Nurse paralegals are a great resource of information when reviewing and interpreting medical records. They are taught to question inconsistencies and discrepancies that could lead a case in the wrong direction. Nurse paralegals can isolate medical facts, sequence of events, and identify missing records, follow chronological events in patients’ records, find correlation in a series of unrelated events, and question the veracity of the information needed for a legal case.

What Do Nurse Paralegals Do?

Nurse paralegals can participate in a case from beginning to end. They can bridge the gap for non-medical parties and extract facts from medical records and place them in an organized report. They may create graphics that demonstrate visually important points, help interview clients under the supervision of an attorney, locate experts, research important pertinent facts, identify standards of care, identify missing medical records, and more.

After having been in this field long enough to understand the process, new roles will emerge. Nurse paralegals may even participate in the client interviewing process to improve overall understanding of the case and how the events unfolded. In fact, by asking a client questions, they may find relevant facts in a medical record or about the case that may have been missed otherwise.

Common Services Provided by Nurse Paralegals

- Assist with obtaining medical records
- Identify, interpret, and review medical records for merit
- Identify missing records
- Define adherences to applicable standards of care
- Define deviations to applicable standards of care
- Consult with healthcare providers
- Develop brief or comprehensive written reports
- Develop outlines, timelines, calendars, or chronologies of events
Why Are Nurse Paralegals Needed?

There are many statistics and studies that have been reported involving injuries or deaths caused to patients through deliberate, reckless, or negligent actions of people in the healthcare field. Medical and nursing malpractice has been the term generally used to denote mistakes made in the medical field that cause injuries or death to patients.

Unfortunately, nurses have all seen practitioners who offer and perform substandard care. Many of these types of incidents are the result of this smaller population of people who need to be held accountable for their actions and/or their omissions. Nurses are the best judge of what should be contained in a medical record. They are experts within their own field and offer insight into the nursing process. If a nurse is to be held accountable for proper sterile technique or assessment of critical changes in a patient’s condition, who best to ask but another nurse in that same field or level of care.

Nurse paralegals can offer more hands-on assistance by way of writing reports in an organized manner to assist with depositions of medical experts or witnesses and to organize medical records. Assisting in live deposition or court situations enables the attorney-nurse team to catch discrepancies as they are being said, and allows the attorney to ask questions in direct response to the statements based on a medical professional’s input. In fact, they are accustomed to teaching in a way that bridges the gap for non-medical people. After all, how many hours of patient education have they performed during their careers? Because this is what their patients expect of them, most nurses find great satisfaction in teaching and helping others. That is why they became nurses in the first place!

What Types of Cases Can Nurse Paralegals Expect?

Nurse paralegals can review any medical record. Medical records that need to be reviewed are primarily seen in cases involving personal injury, medical and nursing malpractice, and workers’ compensation. Below are some examples where the expertise of a nurse paralegal can be invaluable.

• Conduct medical and nursing literature searches
• Analyze and compare expert witness reports
• Help interview plaintiff and defense clients, witnesses, and experts
• Identify factors that caused or contributed to the alleged damages or injuries
• Identify and locate expert witnesses
• Assist in exhibit preparations
• Prepare interrogatories
• Review and analyze medical reports
• Conduct medical research
• Create demonstrative evidence
• Locate a testifying expert
• Locate a consulting expert
Example 1

Given the experience nurse paralegals have in how the hospitals, doctors’ offices, and nursing homes generally function, nurses can easily navigate through medical charts and find issues that many nonmedical reviewers miss. Therefore, the law firm will have them work in medical and nursing malpractice cases in which the nurse paralegal can give an unbiased opinion about the facts of a case. They know what to expect when a patient is admitted with a diagnosis of chest pain, abdominal pain, or shortness of breath. There are universal standards that should be followed for these cases, and nurses can spot them when they are missing. Even if the nurse paralegal has never worked in a legal setting, they still have medical knowledge to be able to pull facts from a medical situation.

Example 2

In personal injury and workers’ compensation cases, the nurse paralegal may find themselves reviewing many years of medical history plus the treatments for the injury. Usually, they will be asked to review those cases that are clouded with past medical issues that make it difficult to know causal relationship. An example would be someone who has a history of neck or back problems. If that person was in an auto accident and had neck pain, how would they differentiate what was caused by the accident? They would list prior diagnostic findings and treatments and compare those to the post-injury list. Then, they would try to find a way to highlight the important differences with graphs, charts, or calendars.

How Do You Become a Nurse Paralegal?

As a medical part of a legal team, nurse paralegals are medical professionals who have not only received an L.P.N., R.N., B.S.N., or M.D. credential, but who have broadened their knowledge and received specialized training in the field of law-related matters.

At Brighton College, our accredited Nurse Paralegal Certificate program provides the foundation in legal studies. You will be able to use research tools and techniques necessary to find laws, rules and regulations, prepare professional legal documents, establish case files, interview experts or witnesses, carry out investigations and demonstrate a broad knowledge of litigation practice, law, and procedure. Further, you will be able to examine the role of the nurse paralegal in the legal environment as well as the laws and ethics needed to give competent, compassionate care to patients within acceptable legal and ethical boundaries.
In addition, with Brighton College’s accredited Nurse Paralegal Certificate program, you will gain the skill and knowledge needed to:

- Identify primary and secondary sources of the law and issues in a case
- Describe the American legal system, legal principles, legal analysis process, the rule of law, and the litigation process
- Apply problem-solving and critical analytical thinking skills within the context of evaluating legal issues
- Evaluate and prepare professional legal documents, establish case files, and interview expert witnesses
- Accurately communicate legal terms in written and/or oral form, with proficiency in the use of technology
- Demonstrate knowledge of the principles of medical/legal ethics and proficiently access, locate, and research the law by both traditional and electronic methods
- Recognize the nurse paralegal’s role in professional negligence, product liability, toxic tort, and criminal litigation

This certificate program is not a degree level program. However, the courses completed within this program earn college credit and may be eligible to transfer into the Associate of Paralegal Studies degree program at Brighton College.
The role of nurse paralegals is continuously growing as the medical legal field expands and the need for this group of skilled and versatile legal staff is on the rise. If you’d like to become part of this talented group of professionals, request information or enroll in the Brighton College’s Nurse Paralegal Certificate program today. Our Nurse Paralegal program will equip you with the skills and knowledge needed to become a successful part of this exciting field.

Request information or apply for the Nurse Paralegal program today!

Visit our website at brightoncollege.edu or contact an Admissions Representative at 1-800-354-1254.