

# THE REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP OCCUPATIONS AND STANDARDS CENTER OF EXCELLENCE (AOSC)

## Psychiatric Technician National Occupational Framework

**ONET-SOC Code: 29-2053.00**

**RAPIDS Code: 3054CB**

This project has been funded, either wholly or in part, with federal funds from the Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration under Cooperative Grant Number AP-36653-21-75-A-11. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of Labor, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement of the same by the US Government.





## ABOUT THE URBAN INSTITUTE

The nonprofit Urban Institute is dedicated to elevating the debate on social and economic policy. For nearly five decades, Urban scholars have conducted research and offered evidence-based solutions that improve lives and strengthen communities across a rapidly urbanizing world. Their objective research helps expand opportunities for all, reduce hardship among the most vulnerable, and strengthen the effectiveness of the public sector.

## Acknowledgments

This document was drafted in partnership with the Council of State Governments (CSG), the nation's only nonpartisan public policy organization serving all three branches of state governments. The Urban Institute and CSG would like to thank the team at the California Association of Psychiatric Technicians (Eric Soto, Carol Weisman, Ann Lyles, and Coby Pizzotti) and the American Association of Psychiatric Technicians (Debi Loger), as well as Paul Estes, Elizabeth Kuhn, Ty Thornton, Tiffany Miller, Maria Valdez, Silvia Davila, Andrew Sanchez, Robert Millay, and Walter Penniman for their review and recommendations.

# Introduction to Using This Document

Under the Registered Apprenticeship Technical Assistance Centers of Excellence award, the Urban Institute leads the Occupations and Standards work. One of the main objectives of Urban's project is to create high-quality, well-researched, consensus-based work process schedules that are nonproprietary and widely available. This document is a product of that work and contains three sections: the occupational overview, the work process schedule, and the related technical instruction.

The **occupational overview** is a general introduction, including alternative job titles, any prerequisites, and, if applicable, the total number of hours needed to complete a time-based or hybrid program.

The **work process schedule** outlines the major job functions, competencies, and/or hours an apprentice completes in a registered apprenticeship program. It outlines what apprentices are expected to learn on the job with the support of a mentor or journeyworker (a worker mastering the competencies of an occupation in a particular industry), including both core competencies and those deemed optional by experts in the field. The work process schedule is the foundational document guiding a program.

Urban works with numerous experts to ensure the content is thoroughly researched and vetted to reflect the expectations of industry, educators, labor unions, employers, and others involved in apprenticeship for this occupation. Sponsors and employers can use the work process schedule as their program standards with assurances it has been approved by experts in the field.

The **related technical instruction** presents considerations for the coursework that apprentices will undertake to supplement on-the-job learning. It is intended to serve as a reference to sponsors exploring their options for the accompanying classroom, virtual, or hybrid training.

## How to Use the Work Process Schedule

Sponsors can adapt the work process schedule to accommodate their needs for competency- or time-based or hybrid programs. In a **competency-based** apprenticeship, sponsors assess apprentices' progress across core and optional competencies listed in the work process schedule. In a **time-based** apprenticeship, apprentices complete a predetermined number of hours across major job functions and the program overall. In a **hybrid** apprenticeship, sponsors monitor apprentices' hours spent on major job functions and assess their proficiency across competencies.

Each program type has a different method of assessment:

- **For a competency-based program**, apprentices engage in activities and make progress toward proficiency in the identified competencies. Sponsors overseeing apprentices' work assess their mastery of the outlined competencies using the following rating scale:

- 4—Competent/proficient (able to perform all elements of the task successfully and independently)
- 3—Satisfactory performance (able to perform elements of the task with minimal assistance)
- 2—Completed the task with significant assistance
- 1—Unsuccessfully attempted the task
- 0—No exposure (note the reason—absence, skill isn't covered, etc.)

The competencies may be completed in any order. Apprentices must perform at a level 4 or 3 in all competencies listed as “core” to complete the apprenticeship program successfully.

- **For a time-based program**, sponsors monitor apprentices' completion of hours in training across major job functions. The total number of hours recommended for this occupation is listed in the occupational overview and is based on guidance from the US Department of Labor. Generally, apprentices must have at least 2,000 hours overall for on-the-job learning, but occupations of greater complexity may require more hours. Sponsors will provide apprentices with supervised work experience and allocate the total number of hours across the major job functions to adequately train their apprentices.
- **The hybrid approach** blends both competency- and time-based strategies. Sponsors measure apprentices' skills acquisition through a combination of completing the minimum number of hours of on-the-job learning successfully demonstrating identified competencies. Sponsors will assess apprentices' proficiencies as described for competency-based programs with a rating scale of 0–4 for every core competency. Generally, apprentices have at least 2,000 hours overall for on-the-job learning, but occupations of greater complexity may require more hours. Sponsors will document apprentices' completion within a minimum and maximum range of hours assigned for each major job function.

# Psychiatric Technician Occupational Overview

## Occupational Purpose and Context

Psychiatric technicians (psych techs) assist other health and behavioral health professionals in caring for, treating, and rehabilitating patients with mental or emotional conditions or disabilities. They do this by monitoring patient health, safety, and well-being; providing nursing, psychiatric, and personal care in accordance with treatment plans; managing patients' daily schedules; and assisting with their overall rehabilitation, development, and (where possible) return to the community.

Psych techs work with people with varying types and degrees of mental illness, developmental disabilities, and/or age-related degenerative diagnoses. This includes people with psychiatric conditions, dementia, developmental disabilities, substance use disorders, and dual diagnoses. In addition, psych techs frequently work with patients who have a criminal record. Psych techs adjust the care they provide based on the patient's needs, including where they are in their treatment. They also work to encourage patients to develop independence and self-reliance. Psych techs can work in a variety of settings, including hospitals, group care facilities (e.g., nursing homes, assisted living facilities), prisons, and on mobile response teams.

Psych techs utilize principles of mental health care and human development, technical expertise, and manual skills to provide direct care to patients. Depending on the needs and preferences of the employer, psych techs perform or assist in one or more of these patient care areas: basic nursing, patient intake, patient assessment, therapeutic activities, recreational activities, educational and vocational activities, medication administration and/or monitoring, treatment plan development, treatment plan implementation, patient and family education, and geriatric care. They may also be required to perform administrative duties, such as record-keeping.

Psych techs serve on interdisciplinary teams, collaborating closely with psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, registered nurses, doctors, rehabilitation therapists, and other psych techs. They perform a vital, frontline function, implementing treatment plans established by these professionals, monitoring and observing patients, and reporting back on treatment progress and any symptoms that require attention.

The responsibilities and duties of psych techs vary depending on the setting, facility, and state where they practice, along with their licenses and certifications. Psych techs are licensed in four states: Arkansas, California, Colorado, and Kansas. Psych techs in these states may have more responsibilities and perform more highly-skilled work—such as informing and implementing patient treatment plans—compared with

psych techs in other states. In some states, psych techs can earn additional certifications needed to perform certain procedures (e.g., drawing blood). In states where psych techs are not licensed, they may be restricted from performing certain tasks such as administering medication, leading group therapy sessions, and transcribing physician orders.

Many facilities also employ entry-level psychiatric aides, who perform nursing and personal care duties. In those facilities, psych techs may focus on providing therapeutic care and monitoring their patients' conditions, whereas psychiatric aides help patients in their daily activities and ensure a safe and clean environment.

## Potential Job Titles

Mental health technician, mental health assistant, mental health associate, mental health specialist, behavioral health technician, behavioral health specialist, behavioral technician

The Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code for psych techs is 29-2053.

## Apprenticeship Prerequisites

Applicants for Psych Tech training programs must have a high school diploma or equivalent. While none of the four states where psych techs are licensed require them to have higher-level degrees, some individual employers may require psych techs to have an associate or even a bachelor's degree. Note that California requires licensed psych techs to be ages 18 years and older.

## Recommended Length of Apprenticeship (Time-Based/Hybrid Programs Only)

Registered apprenticeship programs must include at least 2,000 hours of on-the-job learning and 144 hours of related technical instruction. The recommended length of an apprenticeship for psych techs is 2,000 to 4,000 hours of on-the-job learning and 144 to 288 hours of related technical instruction. This equates to 1 to 2 years. People with prior experience—including people who have served as psychiatric aides—may be awarded prior credit for that experience. Note: the RTI hours recommended here may not meet the minimum licensing requirements for some states. For example, California requires psych techs to complete 576 hours of theory.

Note that there are no required hours for competency-based apprenticeship programs.

# Work Process Schedule

## Psychiatric Technician

ONET-SOC Code: 29-2053.00

RAPIDS Code: 3054CB

### Instructions for Use:

**Competency-based programs:** In the “performance level achieved” column of the work process schedule (see examples starting on the next page), assess apprentices’ performances on each competency with the scale below. No monitoring of hours is required for this approach. See “Guidelines for Competency-Based, Hybrid and Time-Based Apprenticeship Training Approaches,” US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Office of Apprenticeship, October 20, 2015,

<https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/bulletins/Cir2016-01.pdf>.

- 4—Competent/proficient (able to perform all elements of the task successfully and independently)
- 3—Satisfactory performance (able to perform elements of the task with minimal assistance)
- 2—Completed the task with significant assistance
- 1—Unsuccessfully attempted the task
- 0—No exposure (note the reason—absence, skill isn’t covered, etc.)

**Time-based programs:** In the “hours” row, specify the number of hours apprentices will fulfill for each job function. No assessment of competencies is required for this approach.

**Hybrid programs:** In the “performance level achieved” column, assess apprentices’ performances on each competency using the 0–4 scale above. In the “hours” row, identify a range of hours apprentices should spend working on each major job function.

<b>Job Function 1: Maintain a safe and secure environment</b>		
<b>Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):</b>		
<b>Competencies</b>	<b>Core or optional</b>	<b>Performance level achieved (0–4) (competency-based and hybrid programs only)</b>
A. Follow applicable security protocols and checks (e.g., securing staff and hospital equipment, reporting unknown people in unit)	Core	
B. Perform safety checks and watches, including monitoring and observing patients, performing patient counts, and assisting with rounds	Core	
C. Use psychological and physical crisis management techniques (including deescalation) to manage violent or potentially violent situations (considering both patient-on-patient and patient-on-staff violence)	Core	
D. When required, restrain patients who are violent or potentially violent (including to themselves) and monitor patients while in restraint and/or isolation	Core	
E. Perform safety drills (fire, inclement weather, etc.)	Core	
F. Initiate the facility’s emergency response system (e.g., activate codes and alarms, notify appropriate supervisory staff of safety or security issues)	Core	
G. Respond to alarms and participate in emergency codes (e.g., early response and Dr. Strong codes)	Core	
H. Check and maintain integrity of equipment (e.g., adaptive equipment, restraint bags)	Core	
I. Perform checks of patients, visitors, living environment, and mail for prohibited items (e.g., illicit substances, weapons, tobacco)	Optional	

<b>Job Function 2: Implement behavioral health interventions and treatment</b>		
<b>Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):</b>		
<b>Competencies</b>	<b>Core or optional</b>	<b>Performance level achieved (0–4) (competency-based and hybrid programs only)</b>
A. Monitor patients’ emotional and behavioral condition, listen to their concerns, and report significant changes	Core	



and/or unusual behavior to other licensed staff (e.g., MD, psychologist, RN, lead psych tech, etc.)		
B. Monitor and assess patients for suicidal and self-harm behaviors	Core	
C. Provide support during one-on-one therapy sessions and psych visits, when requested by therapists, psychologists, or psychiatrists	Core	
D. Lead prescribed group therapy sessions and other therapeutic group activities (e.g., groups focused on coping skills, anger management, medication management, substance use recovery/relapse prevention), as allowable under state regulations	Core	
E. Assist other behavioral health professionals with running prescribed group therapy sessions and other therapeutic group activities	Core	
F. Encourage and facilitate patient participation in groups and group activities	Core	
G. Assist patients with modifying and managing their behavior, including by teaching positive coping skills	Core	
H. Build rapport with, show empathy to, and provide emotional support to patients	Core	
I. Lead morning, group goal setting, and afternoon wrap-up meetings	Optional	
J. Assist psychologists, counselors, therapists, social workers, and psychiatrists with developing patient treatment plans, including by recommending behavioral interventions based on where patients are in their treatment	Optional	
K. Gather behavioral health information on new patients to complete admission forms, including interviewing them to assess their mental health status and to obtain their mental health and treatment history	Optional	

<b>Job Function 3: Assist with the provision of medical care and treatment</b>		
<b>Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):</b>		
<b>Competencies</b>	<b>Core or optional</b>	<b>Performance level achieved (0-4) (competency-based and hybrid programs only)</b>
A. Observe, measure, and record the patient's physical condition, including taking pulse, temperature, weight,	Core	

blood pressure, blood sugar, and body mass index, and other vital signs		
B. Report out-of-range vitals, physical ailments, and/or significant changes in a patient's condition to other professional staff (e.g., the in-charge nurses)	Core	
C. Listen to patient health concerns and elevate to other professional staff when appropriate	Core	
D. Monitor patients after medication is administered, including verifying medication is taken, taking vital signs, and observing for response and side effects	Core	
E. Provide basic life support (e.g., CPR, the Heimlich maneuver) when needed	Core	
F. Prepare and administer oral and other medications according to physician's prescriptions and facility's procedures, as allowable under state regulations	Optional	
G. Provide pre-operation and post-operation care	Optional	
H. Assist with providing therapeutic care, including turning and repositioning patients in bed and performing range of motion exercises	Optional	
I. Assist with providing care for various medical needs (e.g., diabetic, skin, respiratory, GI, bladder, bowel, wound, and cast care), as allowable under state regulations	Optional	
J. Assist health care practitioners during examinations, treatments, and labs, as allowable under state regulations	Optional	
K. Assist with operating diagnostic or therapeutic medical instruments or equipment (e.g., EKG, IVAC, Sphygmomanometer, scale), as allowable under state regulations	Optional	
L. Provide medication education to patients and families, including to increase medication adherence	Optional	

<b>Job Function 4: Assist patients with activities of daily living</b>		
<b>Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):</b>		
<b>Competencies</b>	<b>Core or optional</b>	<b>Performance level achieved (0–4) (competency-based and hybrid programs only)</b>
A. Help patients manage personal hygiene (e.g., bathing, personal grooming, oral care, keeping clothes clean)	Core	

B. Assist patients with other daily activities (e.g., eating, dressing, toileting, bed making)	Core	
C. Monitor and provide for patients' nutritional needs, including assisting with mechanical feeding	Core	
D. Assist patients with ambulation	Core	
E. Teach patients to use adaptive equipment	Core	
F. Teach patients to perform daily activities on their own, to encourage independence and self-reliance	Core	
G. Supervise maintenance of living space (e.g., help patients keep living areas clean and orderly)	Optional	
H. Assist with laundry care, including managing the clothing and linen exchange	Optional	

<b>Job Function 5: Manage patients' schedules and overall progress</b>		
<b>Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):</b>		
<b>Competencies</b>	<b>Core or optional</b>	<b>Performance level achieved (0–4) (competency-based and hybrid programs only)</b>
A. Assist with admitting, transferring, and discharging patients	Core	
B. Manage communication with patients	Core	
C. Provide new patient orientation	Core	
D. Accompany patients to appointments, services, and activities on- and off-site (e.g., to rehab visits, day treatment centers, canteen, gym, dining room, library, leisure activities), reducing support as they gain skills and independence	Core	
E. Facilitate fresh air breaks	Core	
F. Meet weekly with patient to discuss progress	Optional	
G. Assist with scheduling appointments with other professionals (e.g., physicians, psychiatrists)	Optional	
H. Assist patients in making their own appointments	Optional	

<b>Job Function 6: Support patients' social, vocational, and life skills development</b>		
<b>Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):</b>		
<b>Competencies</b>	<b>Core or optional</b>	<b>Performance level achieved (0–4)</b> (competency-based and hybrid programs only)
A. Assist with providing vocational, social, life skills, financial literacy, leisure, and recreational activities (e.g., helping patients shop, use public transportation, open a bank account)	Core	
B. Encourage and facilitate patient participation in vocational, social, life skills, financial literacy, leisure, and recreational activities	Core	
C. Assist with facilitating outings (e.g., to the mall, to the grocery store)	Core	
D. Provide coaching, mentoring, and guidance to patients to support their overall growth and development	Core	
E. Teach strategies to promote patient independence, including by encouraging patients to perform tasks independently	Core	
F. Teach patients social skills, including by modeling and reinforcing social norms	Core	
G. Teach strategies to promote patient health and wellness (including around sleep, exercise, and nutrition)	Core	

<b>Job Function 7: Perform administrative duties, including documentation</b>		
<b>Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):</b>		
<b>Competencies</b>	<b>Core or optional</b>	<b>Performance level achieved (0–4)</b> (competency-based and hybrid programs only)
A. Complete required reports, notes, and other forms (e.g., shift, incident, and abuse reports; daily/weekly patient notes; documentation of patient property and financial interactions; documentation of patient groups; admission forms)	Core	
B. Update and maintain patients' charts, including recording care given, medications administered, patient vital signs,	Core	

other patient care data, and progress throughout treatment		
C. Maintain medical records in applicable systems	Core	
D. Collect medical information and history from patients, family members, or other medical professionals	Core	
E. Transcribe physician orders, as allowable under state regulations	Optional	
F. Perform clerical work, as required	Optional	
G. Maintain inventory of medical supplies, medication, and equipment	Optional	

<b>Job Function 8: Maintain professional standards and development</b>		
<b>Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):</b>		
<b>Competencies</b>	<b>Core or optional</b>	<b>Performance level achieved (0–4) (competency-based and hybrid programs only)</b>
A. Follow all facility policies and procedures	Core	
B. Maintain all required professional licenses and certifications	Core	
C. Attend program and staff meetings	Core	
D. Complete facility-mandated training and continuing education as required by the state	Core	
E. Maintain patient confidentiality (e.g., ensure HIPAA compliance)	Core	
F. Set limits with patients and maintain appropriate boundaries and behavior	Core	
G. Participate in various committees (e.g., facility and unit-based committees)	Optional	
H. Provide mentorship to new employees	Optional	
I. Participate in process improvement activities	Optional	

# Related Technical Instruction

## Psychiatric Technician

ONET-SOC Code: 29-2023.00

RAPIDS Code: 3054CB

### Instructions for Use:

Registered apprenticeships must include at least 144 hours of related technical instruction (RTI). Courses offered by accredited colleges and universities may be assigned a credit hour determination rather than a contact hour determination. In general, an academic credit unit is the equivalent of 15 clock hours of instruction.

**Development and Use of This RTI Outline:** Employers and academic institutions may approach RTI in markedly different ways. Our goal was not to identify the single best way to provide RTI or to identify a single provider whose content we deemed to be superior. Instead, our goal was to survey numerous education providers, including employers, institutions of higher education, high schools, private continuing education providers, labor organizations, professional associations and, in some cases, municipalities that provide worker training, to identify topics or courses common among those providers that align with the job functions included in this work process schedule. Those common topics or courses are reflected in the RTI outline provided below, which may be useful in developing your RTI program or communicating your needs to an educational partner.

**Licensure or certification requirements:** Psych techs may obtain voluntary certification from the American Association of Psychiatric Technicians. Licensure is required in California, Colorado, Arkansas, and Kansas.

**Degree requirements for licensure or certification, if applicable:** In California, one pathway to certification includes completing a psych tech program at an accredited college or university.

**Accreditation requirements of instructional provider for licensure or certification, if applicable:** In California, one way to become a licensed psych tech is to complete an approved psych tech program offered by an accredited college or university. Colorado, Arkansas, and Kansas require psych techs to complete a state board-approved psych tech program.

**Anticipated changes in licensure or certification requirements, if known:** none

**Examples of state licensure or certification requirements:** California, Colorado, Arkansas, and Kansas are the only states that require psych techs to be licensed.

**California**—The State of California requires psych techs to obtain a license from the Board of Vocational Nursing and Psychiatric Technicians. To become licensed, a person must complete an

application and pay an associated fee, submit fingerprints to the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and pass the California Psychiatric Technician Licensure Exam. Eligibility for the exam can be achieved through three different pathways, including an academic pathway (completion of an approved psych tech program at an accredited college or university), an experience-based pathway (576 hours of instruction in theory and 954 hours of supervised clinical experience over 10 years), and a military pathway (nursing service in the US Armed forces including completion of a military course in neuropsychiatric nursing as well as a military or civilian course in working with developmentally disabled people, plus at least one year of paid work experience). See “Summary of Requirements for Licensure as a Psychiatric Technician,” California Board of Vocational Nursing and Psychiatric Technicians, accessed May 25, 2023,

[https://www.bvnpt.ca.gov/applicants/summary\\_pt.shtml](https://www.bvnpt.ca.gov/applicants/summary_pt.shtml).

**Colorado**—Colorado requires people to complete a board-approved psych tech education program and pass a state certification exam. Colorado recognizes California licensure as an acceptable credential.

#### Examples of RTI providers for this occupation

**Military:** Fort Sam Houston provides training for military personnel who work as mental health specialists.

**Colleges and Universities:** Most colleges and universities offer courses in psychology that can be helpful to psychiatric aides, and some colleges offer specialized programs specifically designed to prepare psych techs. One- and two-year psych tech programs are offered by several two-year colleges. These programs may result in a certificate or an associate degree.

**No Cost Online Providers:** Coursera and EdX provide many free courses in psychology, mental health, and community health that may be helpful in preparing psychiatric technicians to do their job well or enable them to advance in their field.

#### Prerequisite knowledge, skills or experience typically required by RTI providers for this occupation

People interested in pursuing a career as a psych tech must have strong interpersonal communication and good listening skills.

## Certificate Program

<b>First-Aid and Emergency Medical Response</b>
<b>Hours:</b> 10–20
<b>Sample learning objectives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Describe the signs and symptoms of medical emergencies, such as heart attack, stroke, syncope, or seizure and the appropriate emergency response to each to protect the health and safety or save the life of the person suffering a medical emergency.</li><li>▪ Describe the appropriate treatments that can be used to sustain life and reduce further injury in the event of a burn, laceration, accidental amputation, drug overdose, choking, bone fracture, compound fracture, potential head injury, or potential spinal injury.</li><li>▪ List the four main categories and seven types of shock, including potential causes for each and the emergency medical response appropriate for people experiencing shock.</li><li>▪ Demonstrate the ability to determine when to use and how to appropriately use automated external defibrillators.</li><li>▪ Describe the modifications needed in administering first aid and emergency care to infants and children and demonstrate the ability to appropriately administer first aid or CPR to an infant or child.</li></ul>

<b>Introduction to Psychology</b>
<b>Hours:</b> 40–60
<b>Sample learning objectives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Describe the history and origins of the study of psychology.</li><li>▪ Describe key stages in human development and cognition.</li><li>▪ Describe the biology of psychology, including the central nervous system and brain function.</li><li>▪ Explain personality theory and, using case studies, identify how different types of personalities react to stressors, perceive the world around them, and engage in consciousness and self-visualization.</li><li>▪ Describe the types of physiological disorders often seen in human populations as well as the various treatment modalities used to help people cope with these disorders.</li><li>▪ Explain the purpose of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V) and demonstrate the ability to use the manual understand the signs and symptoms of various mental health disorders or diagnoses.</li><li>▪ Explain how people can recover from or develop skills to cope with mental health disorders or crises.</li></ul>



- Discuss the etiology of various developmental disorders, including those that result from genetic abnormalities, accidents or injuries, or drug and alcohol abuse (including fetal exposure or addiction).
- Explain the etiology of common types of developmental disabilities as well as effective strategies for enabling those with developmental disabilities to optimize their learning and cognitive function and to adapt to the limitations imposed by their disability.
- Discuss the role of aging on cognition and brain function and describe the types of cognitive dysfunction seen among elderly populations.
- Discuss the link between mental illness, substance use disorders, and incarceration.

## Psychiatric Treatment Plans

**Hours:** 40–60

### Sample learning objectives

- Explain the role of physicians, physician’s assistants, nurses, psych techs, and psychiatric aides in caring for and treating people with mental health disorders or developmental disabilities.
- Recognize the potential risk factors and warning signs for a range of mental health problems, including depression, anxiety or trauma, psychosis, and psychotic disorders, substance use disorders, and self-injury.
- Explain the role of talk therapy, including group and individual therapy, and discuss the techniques that psychiatric professionals use to engage people in productive talk therapy.
- Discuss the role of occupational therapy, music therapy, art therapy, and emotional support animals in treating people with mental illness or developmental disabilities and demonstrate the ability to support the use of these therapies in treating patients.
- Demonstrate the ability to use appropriate language to communicate clearly with psychiatric patients in inpatient and outpatient treatment centers.
- Explain techniques used to quickly assess a person’s cognitive abilities and mental health status when first meeting a new patient or when interacting with current patients.
- Describe the techniques used to ensure safety to patients and care providers when mental health disorders or developmental disabilities result in tendencies to engage in physical altercations or inflict harm on oneself or others.
- Demonstrate the ability to effectively use deescalation strategies to reduce tension, anger, and anxiety exhibited by patients or their family members.
- Describe the role of physical restraints and other security protocols to protect patient, staff, and public safety and discuss who has the legal authority to order the use of these devices or protocols and the parameters for their use.

- Describe the situations in which a psych tech can independently decide to use physical restraints as well as the situations in which the use of restraints must be ordered or approved by a licensed medical professional.
- Discuss the types of physical, environmental, emotional, interpersonal, and financial stressors that can lead to a mental health crisis, as well as strategies for helping people manage their reactions to those stressors.

## Psychiatric pharmacology

**Hours:** 20–30 (California requires 70)

### Sample learning objectives

- Describe the various categories and classes of pharmaceuticals that are used to treat various types of mental health disorders or developmental disabilities, to slow disease progression or related conditions, and to manage the side effects of certain pharmaceutical products.
- Explain the source of tardive dyskinesia and various ways to treat or help patients manage the symptoms of this pharmaceutically induced disorder.
- Describe the importance of patient compliance with psychiatric treatment plans, including the use of psychiatric medications and the challenges many patients face in adhering to medication schedules and dosages.
- Explain the limitations that state scope-of-practice licenses impose on who can prescribe and dispense or administer pharmaceutical products, and the appropriate role of psychiatric aides in dispensing medications or making sure patients are taking the medications dispensed to them.
- Discuss the complications that can evolve when prescribed pharmaceuticals are mixed with certain over-the-counter medications, alcohol, certain foods, or illicit drugs.
- Explain the signs and symptoms of pharmacological overdose as well as the emergency actions care providers and others must take to assist people who have intentionally or accidentally consumed excess amounts of prescribed medications, self-administered drugs, or alcohol.

## Providing Patient Care and Working in the Clinical Environment

Hours: 30–40

### Sample learning objectives

- Describe the role of each member of the health care team that may be involved in providing patient care or patient support services.
- Explain the privacy protections guaranteed to patients by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) and discuss strategies used by care providers to maintain compliance with the law.
- Explain the key responsibilities of a psychiatric aide, psych tech, nurse, nurse practitioner, psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker, physical therapist, an occupational therapist, or a music, art, or dance therapist and the types of patient care or therapeutic activities provided by each, as well as the scope-of-practice restrictions placed on various professionals.
- Exhibit the ability to communicate clearly, listen actively, and extract key messages or themes from oral and written communication.
- Explain the importance of medical records and demonstrate the ability to read and interpret clinical notes, or contribute to those notes, as appropriate.
- Demonstrate the ability to prioritize among competing demands in the clinical setting.
- Demonstrate the ability to identify the warnings signs of patients who may pose a threat to themselves or others, and describe strategies for managing and diffusing anger or tension in such situations.
- Describe the types of direct care that psychiatric aides, nursing assistants, or psych techs often provide to patients as well as the techniques and assistive devices available to help in providing assistance with bathing, toileting, oral care, eating, transferring from bed to a chair or wheelchair, and ambulating.
- Describe the role of private health insurance, Medicaid, Medicare, and other health care resources in providing treatment, therapy, or assistance to people with mental health or developmental disorders.
- Describe the laws intended to protect patient privacy, ensure the rights of patients in making decisions about their own health care, and, in the event of a mental health crises, enable family members or medical practitioners to commit a person to inpatient care against their will.
- Describe the importance of ethics in medicine and engage in role-playing and case studies to demonstrate the ability to make ethical choices when confronted with challenging situations.

## Optional RTI Courses

In some instances, psych techs may be required to perform the duties of nursing assistants, phlebotomists, or psychiatric aides during the early years of an apprenticeship. In this case, the sponsor may elect to include

related technical instruction on the roles and responsibilities of those paraprofessionals. In addition, some psych techs may work in settings where patients are being treated for substance abuse, in which case additional instruction is likely required. We are providing optional RTI outlines for use by apprenticeship sponsors who wish to prepare apprentices for these additional responsibilities.

Psych techs enrolled in college degree programs are likely required to complete a number of general education, science, and mathematics courses before being admitted to the psych tech program. These prerequisite courses likely include biology, chemistry, anatomy and physiology, college algebra, and statistics.

<b>Nursing Assistant Practice</b>
<b>Hours:</b> 40–60
<p><b>Sample learning objectives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Describe the role of nursing assistants in providing patient care, including in feeding, ambulating, personal hygiene, bedmaking, etc.</li> <li>▪ Describe the proper way to help a patient move in a bed, move from a bed to a chair, ambulate using an assistive device, or ambulate independently.</li> <li>▪ Explain the importance of using correct body mechanics when lifting or moving patients to protect the provider from personal injury.</li> <li>▪ Explain the importance of using personal protective devices, such as gowns, masks, gloves, face shields, and safety glasses, when working with patients to protect against the spread of transmissible diseases and to provide personal safety to health care workers. Demonstrate the ability to select and appropriately use personal protective devices based on a patient’s diagnosis or other factors.</li> <li>▪ Explain the basic function of the main systems in the body, including the circulatory, respiratory, urinary, digestive, neurological, musculoskeletal, endocrine, and reproductive systems. Name the types of physicians that specialize in the care of each system and the types of diseases they commonly treat.</li> <li>▪ Explain the importance of accurately measuring pulse, respiratory rate, temperature, and blood pressure levels as well as the normal ranges for each in adult, pediatric, and neonatal patients.</li> <li>▪ Describe the importance of routine laboratory tests, such as the complete blood count, respiratory gas analysis, urinalysis, and blood glucose testing as well as normal and abnormal results for each.</li> <li>▪ Describe the theory behind measuring blood pressure and the normal blood pressure ranges for infants, children, adults, and the elderly—such as what are common reasons for abnormally high or low blood pressure and what actions should be taken by nursing assistants when an abnormal reading is obtained.</li> <li>▪ Explain normal temperature ranges for adult, neonatal, pediatric, and elderly patients, and based on the method used to obtain body temperature (oral, rectal, body strip, digital devices,</li> </ul>

etc.), describe the action a nursing assistant should take when an abnormal body temperature reading is obtained.

- Explain the importance of good personal and oral hygiene and techniques used by nursing assistants to provide assistance or direct care to patients to maintain good oral and personal hygiene. Describe the techniques used to maintain patient modesty and privacy while bathing or dressing a patient, and describe the techniques used during bathing to examine a patient for bedsores, skin lesions, and other signs of skin degradation or damage. Explain techniques used to avoid, minimize, and treat bedsores and other lesions associated with prolonged time in bed.
- Explain the purpose of nasogastric tubes, chest tubes, urinary catheters, hyperalimentation lines and IV ports, the ways in which each is cleaned and maintained, and ways to detect obstructions or malfunctions of these devices that should be reported to the nurse or supervisor.
- Describe the unique treatments, examinations, or care that must be provided to postsurgical patients, postpartum patients, and those who have experienced significant trauma.
- Describe the stages of death and the signs and symptoms commonly observed among dying patients. Explain the proper procedures to follow when a patient expires.
- Describe the signs and symptoms of a myocardial infarct, cerebrovascular accident, and syncope and the steps that should be taken if a nursing assistant suspects that a patient is experiencing one of these phenomena.

## Substance Abuse Counseling

Hours: 30-40

### Sample learning objectives

- Describe the impact of substance abuse on cognitive function and behavior as well as the reasons people may engage in substance use and abuse.
- Describe the signs and symptoms commonly associated with substance use and abuse.
- List the types of substances that are commonly used and abused as well as the sources of obtaining these substances.
- Describe the role of fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal drug addiction on the well-being of a developing fetus, on labor and delivery, on the physical development of a fetus, and on the cognitive development of an infant, child, or adult.
- Discuss the physical and psychological symptoms patients commonly experience when going through substance abuse withdrawal and the techniques used to minimize or help patients cope with those symptoms.
- Describe the theory behind drug and alcohol cessation programs, such as 12-step programs and other behavior modification programs and discuss the process by which people engage in these programs.

- Describe the types of emotional and physical support that family, friends, and professional caregivers can provide to assist a person in ending substance abuse and addiction.
- Describe the techniques patients commonly use to avoid taking medications.
- Discuss the pharmaceuticals often used in treating substance abuse, as well as the side effects of those medications and the risk of intended or unintended overdose.
- Describe the roles of substance abuse counselors, social workers, physicians, nursing assistants, psychiatric aides, and psych techs in providing care for those who engage in substance abuse.
- Describe strategies for complying with HIPAA and other legal requirements regarding patient rights and patient privacy.

### Relevant military experience

The US Army provides training for mental health specialists, including 20 weeks of training at Fort Sam Houston. MOS68X: Mental Health Specialist

### Diversity, equity, and inclusion

As is the case in other areas of health care, people from underrepresented groups suffer from disparate access to and outcomes from psychiatric care. Women are more likely than men to suffer from mental health disorders, yet they are less likely to seek care, often because of financial concerns, stigma, lack of transportation, lack of time, or lack of child care while receiving mental health care. People who are gay, lesbian, transgender, and nongender conforming experience higher rates of mental health disorders and experience suicidal ideation and engage in self-injury and substance abuse at higher rates than the general population. Health insurance may provide limited coverage for mental health care compared with coverage for other types of illness, and it can be difficult for people in low-income or rural communities to find a qualified mental health provider, though increased utilization of telemedicine may be helpful in resolving those disparities. Socioeconomic factors are a significant effect modifier for health care disparities, meaning that the stressors associated with financial insecurity may exacerbate underlying tendencies to suffer from mental health disorders (Francisco and Chhatwal 2020).

According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the psych tech workforce is composed of 78.9 percent women, 31.6 percent Black workers, and 19.8 percent Hispanic workers (“Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey,” BLS (US Bureau of Labor Statistics), last updated January 25, 2023, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.htm>).

Psych techs can play an important role in providing information to people in their communities about the benefits of mental health care and in helping people find qualified care providers. The way psych techs communicate with others about their work could have the effect of minimizing or exacerbating stigmas about mental illness.

# Works Consulted

- California Board of Vocational Nursing and Psychiatric Technicians, accessed May 25, 2023, <https://www.bvnpt.ca.gov/>.
- “DACUM Competency Profile for the Psychiatric Technician,” California Community College Economic and Workforce Development Program, 2005, [https://ca-hwi.org/public/uploads/pdfs/Psychiatric\\_Technician.pdf](https://ca-hwi.org/public/uploads/pdfs/Psychiatric_Technician.pdf).
- Francisco A. Moreno and Jasleen Chhatwal, “Diversity and Inclusion in Psychiatry: The Pursuit of Health Equity,” *The Journal of Lifelong Learning in Psychiatry* 18, winter no. 1 (2020): 2–7, (<https://focus.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.focus.20190029>).
- “Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey,” BLS (US Bureau of Labor Statistics), last updated January 25, 2023, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.htm>.
- “Psychiatric Technician and Aides,” *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, BLS, last updated May 4, 2023, <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/psychiatric-technicians-and-aides.htm>.
- “Summary of Psychiatric Technician requirements in the State of California,” California Board of Vocational Nursing and Psychiatric Technicians, accessed May 25, 2023, [https://www.bvnpt.ca.gov/applicants/summary\\_pt.shtml](https://www.bvnpt.ca.gov/applicants/summary_pt.shtml).
- US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Office of Apprenticeship. Bulletin 2018-16: Revision to an existing Apprenticeable Occupation: Behavioral Health Aide (Existing Title: Counselor), accessed May 5, 2023, [https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/bulletins/Bulletin\\_2018-16\\_Behavioral\\_Health\\_Aide.docx](https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/bulletins/Bulletin_2018-16_Behavioral_Health_Aide.docx)

## STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE

The Urban Institute strives to meet the highest standards of integrity and quality in its research and analyses and in the evidence-based policy recommendations offered by its researchers and experts. We believe that operating consistent with the values of independence, rigor, and transparency is essential to maintaining those standards. As an organization, the Urban Institute does not take positions on issues, but it does empower and support its experts in sharing their own evidence-based views and policy recommendations that have been shaped by scholarship. Funders do not determine our research findings or the insights and recommendations of our experts. Urban scholars and experts are expected to be objective and follow the evidence wherever it may lead.





500 L'Enfant Plaza SW  
Washington, DC 20024

[www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)