

Careers in Diabetes

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There are a lot of opportunities to make life with diabetes meaningful. One of the ways some PWD do this is through their career. I know myself, along with many of my friends, have done this through a variety of ways. It's definitely not for everyone – because when you work in diabetes and live with it, it can feel like too much diabetes. These lists are not all inclusive, but just some examples to give you a few ideas.

Healthcare Professional Paths

This one may be a little obvious, but what you may not know is that there are many types of healthcare professions to choose from that aren't the traditional doctor or nurse pathways.

Prescriber Options: If you want to be able to prescribe for patients living with diabetes, there are basically three options in the U.S.: Doctor, Nurse Practitioner or Physician's Assistant. There are pros and cons to each, and it really depends on what you want to do leading up to the point of being able to prescribe for people with diabetes.

Certified Diabetes Care and Education Specialists: For this career path, there are a variety of professions who can become a CDCES. As a CDCES, you can provide a lot of education and assistance to people living with diabetes, but you cannot prescribe based on this certification. If becoming a CDCES is your end goal, you can pursue one of these roles (and more):^{1,2}

- Registered Nurse
- Dietitian
- Exercise Physiologist
- Physical Therapist
- Pharmacist
- Psychologist
- Occupational Therapist

Counselor: The mental health side of diabetes is incredibly important, and there are a couple of main ways to become a counselor: psychology or social work. There are different licenses for social work, and with some, you become a certified counselor. As a psychologist, you can also provide therapy or counseling for PWD and their loved ones. This is a very small field currently, and the need for mental healthcare is not going away! [The ADA maintains a list](#) of mental health providers on its website where you could look to make connections and learn more about opportunities in this field.

Pharmacist: It can be SUPER difficult for people to keep track of their medications, the possible side effects and interactions, and what coupons are available for these medications. Pharmacists are in a great position in the community to be able to provide information and insight to help their community thrive.

If healthcare isn't for you, that's ok! There are many options for people who don't want to do healthcare specifically but want to help people with diabetes.

Industry Paths

There are pharmaceutical companies such as the insulin companies, diabetes technology companies such as CGM or insulin pump companies where you would be able to help PWD get the medications or devices that they need. Some of these roles are more sales focused, some are traditional office roles, and some are patient advocacy related. Additionally, there are many smaller diabetes companies such as those that make adhesives, diabetes bags, diabetes display devices, etc. (We have some info about some of these companies in our article on [Cool Tools for Diabetes](#).)

Here are some of the types of opportunities you may be able to find in the industry path:

Tech support: answer calls from CGM or pump wearers and help them with their questions to get their devices working again.

Sales: help get people with diabetes CGM, pumps, medications, etc. You'll likely be working with both people with diabetes and healthcare providers in this role.

Marketing: if you're pursuing a career in marketing, you could do marketing for a diabetes related company.

Engineering: there are many opportunities for different types of engineers – software, biomedical, mechanical, etc.

Production roles: many companies have factories for production, quality control, etc.

Reimbursement: helping ensure products and services are covered by insurances is also a huge area of work in diabetes and could definitely be considered advocacy for patients.

There are more patient-advocacy focused roles and community focused roles at some companies as well, depending on the company. These could be helping to ensure the patient voice is heard at the company or production level, development of products, or product use, and is really important. Other roles may be involved with community organizations, like Children with Diabetes and others.

Research Paths

If your passion is moving diabetes towards the future, research may be for you. There are so many ways to contribute to diabetes research, whether it's a career in STEM and a focus on basic sciences, or it's working on studies in people with diabetes, there are options. Contributing to diabetes research does not have to be your full career focus either, it can be a great option for college graduates who are looking to work in the diabetes space.

You can also get training as a healthcare professional and then pursue your career in research. This is a pretty common path but does not have to be the only way to work in research. It can be helpful to network and meet people doing the research you're interested in conducting (or helping conduct) to get started in the research environment. A lot of these roles are at academic institutions such as universities, but there are other options as well.

Non-Profit Paths

If your main goal is to help people with diabetes, non-profit work could be a great option for you. It can be very rewarding to work for a company whose values match your own. There are a lot of different non-profits all over the world and across the United States that focus on helping PWD in different ways. If your passion is helping children with diabetes, try working at a pediatric focused organization.

If you're more focused on adult care, there are many options – some focused on young adults, some on women with diabetes, and many more. There are also advocacy focused non-profit organizations who work to help change the laws to make living with diabetes easier or more manageable. Non-profits can have a variety of roles and specialties, so you may be able to find a unique role that you enjoy in this environment.

Network and Advocate for Yourself

No matter what type of career you desire, networking and self-advocacy are important in helping you achieve your career goals and advancing your career. It can be hard to do at first, but it's an important part of adult life. For me, I try to focus on my passions, because it's easy for me to talk about the things about which I'm passionate.

When I first became a nurse, I sought out the diabetes educators at the hospital where I was working and told them that my goal was to become a diabetes educator one day. This simple act of introducing myself ended up getting me the job that allowed me to become a CDCES. Leveraging your connections to meet people working in the role you want can be more helpful than you think.

It can also help to remember that most people go into a career in diabetes to help others – and that we're all working towards that same goal. If you're already pursuing a career in diabetes, thank you! If you're not, that's ok, it's not for everyone. But if you change your mind, I've provided some options to consider.

References:

1. [CBCDE Discipline Requirements](#)
2. [Association of Diabetes Care and Education Specialists](#)