



Energy Career Feature

Radiation Therapists

Being a radiation therapist is one of the most rewarding jobs you can get; you get to treat people and watch them improve. A radiation therapist works with a radiation oncologist; they administer the daily radiation treatment under the doctor's supervision and prescription. It is a very fulfilling job with excellent career progression available.



Radiation therapy is the [medical](#) usage of ionizing radiation as part of the treatment of cancer to control malignant cells. It can be used for a variety of reasons from symptomatic relief to even preparing a body for a bone marrow transplant. It can also be used to treat various conditions other than cancer (which with it is mainly associated). An example of a few conditions it can be used for are trigeminal neuralgia, severe thyroid eye disease and the prevention of keloid scar growth.

There are three different stages within radiation therapy, simulation, the [administration](#) of radiation treatment and the treatment stage. The simulation phase involves using pieces of computer software to generate the amount of radiation needed on the tissue. This is usually the job of the oncologist and/or dosimetrist. The administration phase is when the radiation therapy is actually given, a beam is focused on the area required and often is done to a schedule so a certain amount will be done each week, it can be anywhere from two to nine weeks in total. The radiation therapist is responsible for monitoring the treatment i.e. making sure that no harmful rays are inadvertently administered to the wrong area. Finally, the treatment phase is when the actual radiation therapy has stopped, this is when the doctor will check on the patient to see how he/she has responded to treatment and any issues they may have with it. Radiation therapy technologists tend to help with administrative duties such as record keeping, reports and data management at this stage.

Within radiation therapy there is a range of positions available beginning with radiation oncologists, they are the doctors who oversee the care taken over individual cancer patients. They create the treatment plan as well as monitoring the patients progress and if needs be tweaking it to make it better and/or more effective. Oncologists have completed 4 years of [college](#), 4 years of medical school, 1 year of medical [training](#) and another 4 years of residency training in radiation oncology.

Medical radiation physicists are there to make sure that the machinery works correctly as well as doing safety tests

regularly. In terms of treatment, they work with the doctor on planning and delivering the patients therapy. They must have also done 4 years of college plus medical training.

A radiation therapist works with the oncologist effectively as an assistant, administering the therapy to the patients whilst under the supervision of the doctor. A radiation therapist goes through a 2 to 4 year educational program after high school or college and must then take an exam to become certified by the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists.

Dosimetrists carefully calculate the dosage to make sure the tumor gets enough radiation. They develop treatment plans that will work best at destroying the tumor but leaving the normal tissue in perfect condition. They work with the doctors and medical physicists to choose the treatment plan needed. Most Dosimetrists start off as radiation therapists but go through intensive training. However, you can also do a one to two year program to go get to the position directly. The Medical Dosimetrist Certification Board certifies you when you have trained completely. Last year 32 states needed radiation therapists to be licensed by a State board. The requirements however could be different in each State. More information can be obtained from State licensing offices.



Dieticians are there to make sure patients get all of the nutrition they need to keep them as healthy as possible whilst undergoing treatment. Dieticians spend four years at college and then usually do a one year [internship](#) after.

Finally, radiation oncology nurses care for patients during the course of treatment. They are there to tend to the human side like letting the patient know what the potential side effects are. Most nurses have specific nursing degrees as well as having done courses specific to oncology.

A radiation therapist will earn on average \$57,700, most earn between \$47,000 and \$69,000. If you get to the top of your profession however you can be earning in the region of \$83,000. There is a huge amount of career opportunities for a



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radiation therapist and they are available in all areas of the country. A radiation therapist will generally be employed in hospitals, universities or clinics. As shown at the beginning of this article there is an excellent chance of career progression with positions such as chief therapist, educational director or dosimetrist available. Administrative positions are also easy to get hold of.

If you wish to become a radiation therapist then you need to have completed four years of college in order to be able to get straight in a decent level and give yourself a good chance of career progression. To be at the top of the profession you will need to spend over a decade learning but to be a radiation therapist you can achieve that status a lot faster.

It is definitely worth while, this is the kind of profession that really makes a difference to society; you will be helping people on a day to day basis.

Every member of the team has an essential part to play from the doctors who tend to get the most recognition to the nurses who are there with the patients after treatment and helping with the mental aspects as well as the physical. Radiation therapists are positioned well as they get a good balance of interaction with the patient as well as the hands on approach of actually administering the treatment. It is well paid and you have the possibility of advancing in the field to a higher position with more power and responsibility.

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