

Home health care a growing need and business in California

By Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

The fastest-growing profession in California doesn't require a college degree and provides constant validation that you are making a difference in someone's life.

But the same job pays little more than minimum wage and demands intense exposure to the sick and dying.

Home health aides visit the elderly and disabled to assist them with simple medical tasks like getting shots and dressing wounds while also helping them get around.

As baby boomers age, the number of home health aides will increase by 32,000, or 52 percent, across California by 2020, according to new projections by the state Employment Development Department. That's a faster rate of growth than any other profession with more than 10,000 California workers.

A related profession, personal care aides, will grow by 43 percent, adding 138,200 jobs.

"It's a huge need, and it's a growing need," said Ken Erman, CEO of Rx Staffing and Home Care in Sacramento. "People need some assistance, but they don't need so much help for them to go to a nursing home."

The rise in home health aides will correspond with a historic increase in the number of very old Californians – and it will probably not be a short-term trend.

Within 30 years, the number of Californians over 85 – the age group most likely to use a home health aide – will more than

triple to almost 2 million, growing eight times faster than the state's population as a whole, according to projections from the California Department of Finance.

Besides home health aides, that growth will contribute to increased demand for myriad health professionals – from occupational therapy assistants to pharmacy aides.

The EDD predicts the number of California jobs in the health care support sector will increase by 25 percent by 2020, compared with 16 percent growth in jobs overall.

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