

Best Careers 2009: Biomedical Equipment Technician

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Overview. Imagine you're in a hospital bed, hooked up to a heart monitor and a ventilator. Those machines had better be working properly. Fortunately, they almost always are. Whom do you thank? A biomedical equipment tech.



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This is one of the few health careers in which you are key to helping [patients](#) recover yet there's (usually) no blood or gore. Biomed techs enjoy other pluses, too. You're not limited to repairing stuff: You install, train, calibrate, and perform maintenance. And you're always working on new, ever better equipment such as combined PET/CT scanners and robotic radiosurgery units, which irradiate a tumor but not the surrounding cells. Only a two-year degree is required, and the job market is terrific—you're unlikely to ever hear the word "layoff." This [career](#) is resistant to off-shoring, although some state-of-the-art machines allow remote diagnostics, so if a Texas MRI machine breaks down in the middle of the night, a tech in Indiana or India can figure out what's wrong.

This career's main downside is periodic stress. If that heart-lung machine stops working in the middle of a bypass operation, you'd better fix it now. Of course, if you do save the day, you are a true hero. A more significant downside is that biomed techs increasingly need aptitude both for fixing equipment and for tweaking the computers embedded in leading-edge machines, like an automatic infusion pump that can say, "No. That's too big a dose." Ever more knowledge of computer hardware, software, and networking is required.

Another downside is that perhaps one week a month, you'll be on 24-hour call—that patient on the heart-lung machine can't wait until the morning. Fortunately, you're likely to be called in only once or twice a week.

Next time you're visiting someone in the hospital and hear those lifesaving beeps and alarms, think about whether you just want to be grateful to a biomed tech or become one.

Day in the Life. The way the day started, you would never have guessed that this would be one of your most stressful days ever. You arrive at the community hospital that employs you and start on routine maintenance of EKG, ultrasound, and defibrillator machines, and you recalibrate a laser scalpel.

You're interrupted by an emergency page to a patient room—the ventilator isn't working properly. Worse, the hospital's other ventilators are all in use. You race in to check the machine's components: Yes, it's dispensing the oxygen at the proper rate, but you discover that the depth of the "respiration" is too low. Fortunately, the problem is just that a rubber tube came loose. You fix it, and the patient begins breathing normally again.

You're relieved that your next task is to help the manufacturer's field rep install your hospital's second CT scanner. Cool—the new machine is a real improvement over the old one. But the calm doesn't last long. You receive a distress call from a temporary nurse who doesn't understand how to get the new patient monitor to retrieve the needed information. You train her, as a few other nurses look on.

[Surgery](#) calls to tell you that the voice-controlled surgical table won't lift the patient's legs up. Lucky again, it's simply a dead battery in the voice-control module.

Finally, you want to give yourself a reward, so, rather than going back to the routine maintenance you started your day with, you tackle repairing the hospital's X-ray film processor. You tinker with it: no luck. You peruse the manual: no luck. But fortunately, there's no rush with this; X-ray film processors aren't used much in today's era of digital radiography. It can wait until tomorrow.

Salary Data

Median (with eight years in the field): \$49,000

25th to 75th percentile (with eight or more years of experience): \$46,100-\$63,400

Note: If you're employed by an equipment manufacturer and you hold the appropriate specialty certification, your salary can exceed \$90,000.

(Data provided by [PayScale.com](#))

[Bioinstrumentation and Technology](#) conducts an [annual salary](#) survey.

Education

A two-year associate of applied science degree is typically required. [Leading training programs](#).

Learn More

- [Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation](#)
- [24/7](#) (a trade magazine)
- *Techcareers: Biomedical Equipment Technicians* by Roger Bowles

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BMET

I have been in electronic maintenance for over 20 years. Maintaining equipment for the military and private sector. I have worked in design, machining, programming, Quality Assurance, Management and several other departments. My current factory is closing after 14 years with them; I am ready.

I have been researching BMET and am excited with the opportunity. I have rarely felt in my work that it has served a meaningful purpose. Now I may have that opportunity. For the

Don McElfresh of IN
Apr 12, 2009 09:50:17 AM
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guy who ask if 60 is to old to change careers. I felt the same way but realized you are never to old to give up on your dreams.

I have several years of college (a long time ago) and hope to attend IUPUI, starting next year.

Considering Bio-Med Tech at 45

Michigan has been tough and the downsize finally hit.

Have been a technician travelling, working with, installing and performing diagnostics on "CNC" router equipment since leaving Uncle Sam in "88"

Back then it was Sonar and the "Hunt for Red October"

Sounds like an oppportunity to be back on-stage.

Intrigued by the possibilities!

Arno Rosenberg of MI
Apr 07, 2009 17:54:46 PM
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cbmt

i was laid off in current career, and i am thinking about cbmt. does anybody think that 60 is too old to get hired, i mean realistically.

al harris of LA
Apr 01, 2009 21:47:43 PM
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