

Scrubs to Servers – Gearing Up for a Career in Nursing Informatics

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My transition into nursing informatics is the next step in my career, building on extensive clinical experience and opportunities I have had to work with electronic health records (EHRs). I have 14 years of direct patient care nursing experience, led the clinical implementation of HST Pathways/eChart in a prior role, and participated in Epic implementation and optimization through my graduate practicum at Parkland Health. I am completing an MSN in Nursing Informatics, with graduation expected in December 2026.

This paper looks at three different informatics roles, compares the expectations of those roles with my current skill set, and sets out a three-year plan to close skill gaps. My immediate objective is to get into a dedicated informatics role. I have already applied internally for the Nurse Informaticist role at Cook Children's Health Care System and taken an Epic Sphinx assessment test assigned by the recruiter.

Research Nursing Informatics Careers

Table 1 details the responsibilities, qualifications, and compensation for my three selected informatics roles. The Cook Children's salary data is an external market estimate, as the posting does not provide a salary range.

All three roles require the ability to bridge the clinical need with technology and work effectively across disciplines. Cook Children's has a certification pathway in place after placement, Providence is very much focused on virtual support and adult learning, and the Veterans Health Administration is looking for someone with significant experience in their own clinical applications. The differences between the three are such that Cook Children's is clearly the most direct fit for my current career objective, the other two being roles which would develop a very different set of skills.

Table 1*Comparison of Selected Nurse Informatics Positions*

Category	Cook Children's Health Care System	Providence	Veterans Health Administration (VHA)
Job title and setting	<i>Nurse Informaticist</i> Fort Worth, Texas; on-site; first shift; 40 hours/week.	<i>Clinical Informatics Specialist–Remote</i> Remote in an eligible footprint state, within two hours of a Providence location. Wednesday–Saturday, 1100-2130 PST.	<i>Registered Nurse–Informaticist</i> Remote; full time; Monday–Friday.
Key day-to-day responsibilities	Support integrated EHR design, implementation, and modification. Connect clinicians, providers, patient care services, and Information Services. Support multidisciplinary initiatives, regulatory requirements, quality/safety, and efficient clinical workflows.	Provide virtual Epic support to clinicians and caregivers. Connect clinical practice with Information Services. Support technology implementation, learning, adoption, and optimization.	Assess, implement, and evaluate EHR-related hardware and software. Provide application support and optimization; manage content, data, requirements, and change. Collaborate across disciplines, educate staff, and establish measurable informatics goals.
Required qualifications	Accredited BSN; at least three years of direct patient care; one year documenting and reviewing charts in Epic or an equivalent system; Texas or compact RN license. If not already certified, obtain Epic Clinical Informaticist Certification within nine months of hire.	Bachelor's degree in an accepted clinical or related field, or equivalent education/experience; two years in similar clinical information system duties; EHR experience; experience with adult learning.	Qualifying nursing education and current, full, active, unrestricted RN license. Additional education, experience, scope, and competency criteria depend on the assigned nursing grade.
Preferred qualifications	Master's degree in business or healthcare; current Epic certification. Supported application proficiency/certification recommended within two years of hire.	Informatics certification or credentialing.	At least three years as a Clinical Application Coordinator, with experience documented within the last year; CPRS/VistA experience.
Salary range	Not disclosed by Cook Children's. External comparison estimate: \$86,900 – \$123,223/year, the local 25th–75th percentile range for nurse informaticists. Fort Worth average: \$106,669/year (Salary.com, 2026). These are market benchmarks, not a verified Cook pay range or individual offer.	Texas: \$30.59–\$47.49/hour. Calculated annual equivalent: approximately \$63,627–\$98,779 at 40 hours/week for 52 weeks; not an employer-posted annual range.	\$73,948–\$134,618/year. Placement depends on education, experience, scope of practice, and applicable criteria.
Sources	LinkedIn (n.d.); Salary.com (2026)	Providence (n.d.)	USAJobs (2026)

Self-Assessment

I feel that my strongest preparation for an informatics role comes from my previous experience with developing usable clinical workflows and supporting system implementation. During my time at Legent Health, I gathered staff feedback, configured HST code tables and questionnaires, provided go-live support, and continued troubleshooting and optimization after implementation. I also continued to teach clinicians how to use a wide variety of workflows, increasing my own understanding of each user role by teaching others. Through this work, I learned to listen to both nurses and providers and streamline the system to fit their preferences and physical workflows. I also gained experience championing changes to staff with varying levels of technological ability. My practicum at Parkland has built on these experiences by involving me in Epic Community Connect testing and go-live activities, Project Align workflow observations, and collaboration with both informatics and operational staff. Table 2 compares these strengths with areas where I still need more independent practice. The skill levels are based on my own assessment of my abilities, not on formal competency ratings.

Many of my HST responsibilities matched functions described in the job postings, even though my main title was still clinical. Recognizing this connection helps me value the work I have already put in. However, I also know that experience with one EHR, which is not widely used, does not mean I am fully prepared to work independently in every informatics setting. My priority areas for growth are gaining deeper application-specific knowledge, especially with Epic. I need to practice formal project management methods and build more experience with independent analytical work. I want to become more confident in using data to evaluate whether a workflow change solves the original problem. By identifying these gaps, I can develop a learning plan while still valuing the clinical judgment and practical experience I already bring.

Table 2*Comparison of Position Expectations with Current Skills*

Skill Area	Role Expectations	Current Skills	Gaps/Next Steps
Clinical workflow knowledge	All three: clinical processes and effective EHR use.	Strong: urgent care and perioperative experience; HST workflow design and Project Align observations.	Develop experience with additional specialties and system-wide workflows.
EHR systems and configuration	Cook: Epic or equivalent; Providence: clinical information systems; VHA: CPRS/VistA preferred.	Strong HST experience; developing Epic implementation knowledge. eChart Superuser certification and Cook UCC Epic Superuser selection.	Obtain role-specific Epic credentials. CPRS/VistA experience remains a gap for VHA.
Testing and optimization	Cook: EHR implementation and modification; VHA and Providence: application improvement/support.	Developing: Day in the Life testing, Epic go-live support, and HST troubleshooting.	Write structured test cases and document expected results, defects, and follow-up.
Data analysis	VHA: measurable goals and enterprise data management; analysis can support improvement in all three roles.	Developing: need stronger evidence of independent analysis and interpretation in my professional portfolio.	Practice data cleaning, summary measures, and baseline versus follow-up comparisons.
Technical tools	Application support across roles. SQL, Excel, and visualization tools are development areas, not explicit requirements in all postings.	Practical HST configuration and Microsoft Office use; SQL and advanced analytics proficiency are not established by my resume.	Strengthen Excel analysis, practice Qlik reporting, and complete introductory SQL training.
Project and change management	Cook: multidisciplinary initiatives; VHA: requirements and change management; Providence: adoption.	Developing: HST implementation lead and participation in the Epic implementation lifecycle.	Use project plans, stakeholder maps, risk logs, and measurable objectives.
Basic coding and programming	Not explicitly required in the selected postings but identified as a development need through the Epic Sphinx assessment.	Limited experience. I felt confident in logic and math but struggled with coding, which is not covered in my TTU informatics program.	Complete a beginner programming course and practice variables, conditional statements, loops, and basic problem-solving.

Note. Ratings are provisional self-assessments: strong means repeated hands-on experience; developing means some experience with further practice needed. Requirements refer to the postings unless identified as additional development goals.

Career Preparation Plan

My plan covers the next three years and combines formal education, technical training, clinical involvement, volunteer participation, and independent learning. The priority right now is completing my MSN and continuing the transition into a dedicated informatics role. However, completion of my MSN alone will not be treated as proof that I meet every eligibility requirement. Application-specific goals are conditional on placement in a role that provides the appropriate training and access. I would also like to obtain NI-BC certification through the ANCC, once I meet eligibility requirements. Table 3 links each stage of my plan to a practical demonstration of progress.

Taking the Epic Sphinx assessment helped me identify an additional learning goal for my plan. I felt that I did very well on the logic and math sections, but I struggled with the coding section. Coding has not been a significant part of my nursing informatics program, so that portion was very unfamiliar to me. I would like to include an introductory coding course in my independent learning to become more comfortable with basic programming concepts. This experience gave me a specific area to work on as I prepare for an informatics role.

Table 3

Three-Year Career Preparation Timeline

Time Frame	Actions/Learning Opportunities	Evidence of Progress
Now–3 months Oct 2026–Jan 2027	Complete my MSN and remaining Parkland practicum. Confirm analytics skill levels and gather faculty-supervised practicum records. Continue clinical practice and UCC superuser participation. Complete a beginner programming course through Udemy or another online platform. Update my resume and portfolio with verified examples.	MSN completion targeted for December 2026; practicum documentation retained; programming course completion and several practice exercises demonstrating an understanding of basic programming concepts; two portfolio examples describing my contributions and outcomes.

Time Frame	Actions/Learning Opportunities	Evidence of Progress
3–6 months Jan–Apr 2027	Practice with short coding exercises to address the gap I identified during the Epic Sphinx assessment. Complete independent online training in advanced Excel and introductory SQL. Seek a mentor and an informatics role or supervised optimization assignment.	Completion of least 10 exercises demonstrating basic programming logic and code interpretation; one cleaned Excel dataset/pivot summary; 10 SQL exercises covering filtering, joins, and aggregation; one documented workflow improvement opportunity.
6–12 months Apr–Oct 2027	Apply project methods to a small EHR improvement. Create a training guide and evaluation. Begin employer-supported Epic training if access is available. If hired into the Cook role, obtain its Epic Clinical Informaticist Certification within 9 months of placement.	Project charter, workflow map, test results, and before/after measure; one training session with feedback; Epic training milestones tracked from actual hire date.
Year 2 Oct 2027–Oct 2028	Develop a Qlik dashboard or the visualization tool used by my employer. Verify NI-BC eligibility and pursue the exam when eligible. Seek supervised build/reporting work and broader project responsibility. Volunteer for an ANIA/HIMSS activity or mentor another superuser.	One dashboard with data definitions and validation; credential eligibility review and exam plan; one project with documented outcomes; one professional volunteer contribution.
Year 3 Oct 2028–Oct 2029	Lead a larger optimization project and present results to stakeholders or a professional group. Maintain clinical workflow exposure and mentor staff. If in the Cook role, pursue supported-application proficiency/certification within 2 years of placement as recommended. Reassess VA-specific development if still interested.	One project led through implementation and evaluation; one presentation or portfolio case study; application credential progress; updated self-assessment and next career goals.

Note. These are proposed goals, with progress reviewed every six months. Epic milestones depend on employer-supported access and the actual placement date. NI-BC eligibility requires an active RN license, qualifying education and nursing experience, 30 hours of informatics continuing education within three years, and an eligible practice-hour pathway (American Nurses Credentialing Center, n.d.).

Reflection

Pursuing a role in informatics will allow me to build on my clinical background and contribute to improving the technical systems that clinicians rely on, not only EHRs but also communication devices, emergency alert systems, and many others. During my time at Legent Health, I saw firsthand that transitioning from paper documentation to an EHR is about far more than just installing new software. The workflows must make sense to the people who use them. By listening to staff, making configuration changes, and teaching different user roles, I realized how important those details are for successful adoption. My practicum at Parkland has given me a chance to observe these same challenges and solutions on a larger scale. Well-designed, thoughtfully implemented health IT can support safer care and reduce the burden on users (Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology [ONC], n.d.-b). I hope to contribute to this work by bringing the perspective of someone who has used these systems while providing direct patient care.

I also want to strengthen my ability to use evidence and data to guide decisions in practice. Clinical decision support tools, such as condition-specific order sets and workflow guidance, can bring important information into the care process (ONC, n.d.-a). Still, I want to be able to assess whether a change truly benefits clinicians and addresses the underlying issue. Building my skills in Excel, SQL, and reporting would allow me to compare outcomes before and after making improvements. In addition, practicing formal project management methods would help me stay organized, document my decisions, and follow through on evaluating the results.

Working on this assignment helped me see the value of my past experiences, as well as the areas where I still need to grow. Many of the responsibilities listed in the job postings were familiar to me from my previous work, even though my role was clinical. Taking the Epic Sphinx assessment gave me a new perspective on my readiness for informatics roles. I felt comfortable with the logic and math sections, but I struggled with the coding section. Although that was frustrating, it helped me identify a clear learning goal. Adding a beginner programming course and setting aside time for regular practice seems like a realistic way to address this gap.

My immediate goal is still to move into a dedicated informatics role, and I believe Cook Children's is the best fit for my current experience and interests. I already work there, and I love the company and culture. Completing my MSN will be an important milestone, but I recognize that I will need additional training on specific applications and ongoing practice. I am also interested in pursuing NI-BC certification once I am eligible. In the long term, I hope to take on more project responsibility and help implement changes that improve care beyond one patient or shift. My three-year plan outlines practical steps toward this goal, while allowing flexibility as I continue to learn and grow.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Attestation

I attest that I used generative AI tools in accordance with course guidelines and assignment-specific permissions.

I used ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2026) on October 14, 2026, to help me organize information. The prompt(s) used included: "Can you look at these job descriptions and my resume and help me create three tables to address each part of this assignment?" I also used ChatGPT to compare my assignment to the rubric and check for errors. I used Grammarly on October 14, 2026 to help refine sentence clarity and check grammar.

All AI-generated content was critically reviewed, edited, and appropriately integrated with my own academic and clinical reasoning.

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