



TRUSTED HEALTH
New Graduate Resources



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Earning your degree is one of the most important steps in your career as a nurse, but it is only the beginning. What comes next can be confusing, so we've compiled a comprehensive walkthrough that will help you navigate your path to putting that hard-earned degree to use.

As you navigate this series, you'll learn everything you need to know about managing all your credentials, recommendations for choosing a specialty, finding and applying to nurse residency programs, and alternative nursing opportunities. By the end of this series, you'll be equipped with the information you need to confidently start your career as a nurse.



STEP 1

You've Passed the NCLEX. Now What?

Finding Your First Job as a Registered Nurse

Congratulations! You've not only come out on the other side of a rigorous and difficult education, but you're now officially a Registered Nurse and are ready to start what can become an extremely fulfilling and high-growth career! Now that you can finally get rid of those NCLEX books, notecards, study guides, and apps, it's time to focus on applying all the knowledge and experience you have to start practicing with those new initials after your name.

While starting a nursing career is a really exciting time, it can also be a bit daunting to find new opportunities as a new grad. So, we're here to help navigate this time to get you started off on the right foot. In this section, we'll cover what you need to know from a high level in order to get a handle on what comes next and what you can expect. In the steps below, we'll go into more detail so you finish this series with an action plan to make sure you're set up to succeed in your new career as a Registered Nurse.

Registered

Whether you know exactly which specialty you'd like to pursue, or you haven't the slightest idea or preference, there's a lot to consider. If you did a capstone on a specific unit, that experience is valuable in two ways: first, you probably have a pretty good understanding of whether it's one you'd like to pursue; and second, the experience, though probably brief, can help you land a nursing job in that specialty (but also potentially be turned down for others).

Some specialties are more opportunistic for new grads than others, so it's important to be ambitious but also open and flexible. For example, as you may have heard by now, it's relatively easier to start in acute care, specifically Med-Surg (more on this later). It's most important to get initial experience in an environment that provides for learning, growth, and support with getting through the steep learning curve of being a new grad nurse.



Keep in mind that it's not the end of the world if you don't start out in the specialty you're most interested in. Your first nursing specialty can be just that—your *first*. On the other hand, it may actually positively change the trajectory of your career in ways you didn't anticipate. Consider getting certified in that specialty or getting additional certifications that might make you more marketable. For example, if you're set on working in critical care, take steps to getting ACLS certified.

For pediatrics, PALS is now required nearly everywhere, and seeing it on your resume can be the differentiator between you and another applicant with a similar profile. While it's not always required in order to apply for the position, it shows initiative and dedication. Something to keep in mind from a strategic standpoint is that it's typically easier down the line to switch specialties in certain situations. For example, it's easier to switch specialties within pediatrics, or within critical care or acute care, rather than from one to another. It doesn't mean it's impossible, it just tends to be a bit easier from an opportunistic standpoint.

Care Setting/Environment

The beauty of nursing is that there are a variety of care settings to work in, whether it's acute care, primary care, critical care, or ambulatory care (just to name a few!). Deciding which care setting is right for you should take into account your strengths and motivation. Think about the types of environments you regularly thrive in throughout various aspects of your life. Consider the following descriptors and what resonates with you - fast paced, high intensity, focused, detailed, autonomous, team based, more hands-on versus not.

Care setting is typically a function of specialty. Keep in mind that, generally, starting with inpatient care will make it easier to navigate through different opportunities later on. It can be difficult to move into inpatient later on without prior experience, and when you're no longer a new grad. Nurses tend to learn a lot of hard and soft skills from inpatient experience that transition more seamlessly to outpatient care than the other way around. But again, that's not to say it's impossible!

Getting Started - That First Job

Some hospitals and health care facilities will hire new grads, whereas others require you to be hired specifically through a new grad program, also known as a nurse residency program. These are typically only offered during certain times of the year or on a periodic basis. Alternatively, there are health care facilities or employers that will train you on the job and don't offer or require a formal program. The route you go will depend on your preference, but also on the opportunities available based on your specific (or non-specific) preferences.

Finding Residency Programs

A Nurse Residency Program is a formalized entry into nursing practice that consists of both structured hands-on and classroom-based learning on clinical and professional topics. Residency programs are usually created and hosted by hospital systems and can last from three months to one year in length. Most hospitals will advertise their programs on hospital career pages. It's not uncommon for there to be a lack of information about specifics: when applications open, when the assignment starts, application and eligibility requirements, etc. Some don't specifically call out that it's an RN residency program and instead just post positions for Clinical Nurse I's, RN's, etc. It requires a decent amount of diligence to become informed of these.

If you're flexible on where you go but know you want to start in a residency program:

- Determine which hospitals have recurring residency programs
- Set Google job alerts on the facility career pages so you're alerted as soon as they open
- Input application dates on your calendar
- Reach out

If you're pretty set on working at one or a select few hospitals:

- Locate their career pages and bookmark them
- Study up on the hospital's mission, vision, values, and ensure your application reflects alignment
- Convey your excitement and interest by writing a compelling personalized cover letter for these few hospitals you're really interested in; ensure it's not cookie-cutter and seems like something you've simply attached to every application you've submitted
- Be diligent about searching on these pages and within open positions for any mention or information about a new grad program
- Connect with a clinical educator that runs the program
- Reach out to a hiring manager
- Reach out to a nurse that may work on that unit or has gone through the program before to learn about their experience
- Utilize your network - nursing school, friends, family, etc.

Alternative Initial Jobs for RNs

Think outside the box. It can take some time for a new grad program to open up, and the sooner you can get experience, the better. Look for non-traditional opportunities that may be easier to start in without prior experience. These may be flu shot clinics, school nursing, occupational health, home health, or primary care. If you start in one of these settings but know that you still want to pursue inpatient care or a different setting, be sure to not let the fact that you're now working with an income and experience take your eyes off the prize. You must remain just as motivated and persistent about the job you really want as if you were unemployed and didn't have an option B.

Utilize your network. It's often not obvious which health care facilities will hire nurses without previous experience but don't do a formal new grad program. Consider starting where you did your capstone or geographically close to where you went to nursing school. While new grad programs are comprehensive and have proven positive outcomes, it doesn't mean that you can't receive a lot of the same benefits and professional exposure elsewhere.

Advice & What To Do Next

Take initiative and get exposure:

- Shadow when and where you can

- Connect to those in your network and reach out to learn more; the ask doesn't necessarily have to require a lot from someone else (avoid any variation of "Hey, can you get me a job?"), but rather try to learn from their own experience and what advice they might have for you having been in your shoes before

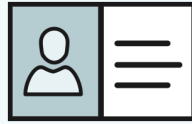
Get your ducks in a row:

- Letters of Recommendation
- Don't wait until you need them to ask for them!
- Provide as much detail to your references as possible; give them ammunition to write a glowing recommendation
- Give them specifics about the hospitals you're most interested in working at so they can tailor the letters
- Ensure you get both general and specific letters of recommendation

Be selective about how you use the time you have now. Once you officially enter the workforce, you're likely going to be gainfully employed for a long time. While it may seem urgent and important to get that first opportunity and start working, it's worth keeping in mind that this is precious time you'll likely never get back. If there is anything on your personal bucket list that you anticipate making logistically work down the line when you are in a committed full-time position, consider how you can do it now.

Certain experiences often make you more interesting and marketable. A good opportunity is to plan something for the time immediately after you take your NCLEX. If you're properly preparing and sit for the exam in a short while after graduation, you'll want and *need* a period of time focused on your health, wellness, relationships, and personal goals. This will also help to take your mind off of the wait until you receive the results and are officially licensed!

In the following articles, we'll go into more detail of each of the topics we touched on here.



STEP 2

Managing Your (New!) Credentials

Nursing school is (supposed to be) the hard part; getting licensed to start your career shouldn't be. Here are all the things to keep in mind as you navigate the logistics of starting your nursing career off on the right foot. From licensure to Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to other necessary documentation, we've got you covered. You'll be up and running in no time and thanking yourself later for having your ducks in a row from day one!

Obtaining Your License

Determine Where You'll Be Working

The first step in obtaining a nursing license is deciding where you'll get licensed. While all registered nurses must pass a national exam (NCLEX) for initial licensure by examination, actual licensing to practice is done at the state level.

This part can be tricky. The process can feel a little bit backward because you're not sure where you'll be working, since you don't yet have job prospects and haven't gotten licensed to even be considered for a position.

Nursing can vary greatly geographically, which is important to take into account when considering where you wish to start your nursing career. Most new grads decide to apply for initial licensure either in their home state or in the state they attended nursing school.

This is typically because it's where they have the most relationships and greatest opportunities for employment. Other new grads prefer to apply outside of their home state with the intent of relocating entirely. The beauty of the profession is that nurses are needed consistently pretty much everywhere.

Note that a new grad can only submit an application for licensure by examination to one state.

Any subsequent licenses will be acquired by endorsement of this primary license. It's important to ensure you're applying for your initial license in the state for which you commit to obtaining your first job.

Applying for Licensure

So you've decided which state you'll be applying to for initial licensure. Now what? The next step is to apply for licensure with the [board of nursing for the state](#) in which you've decided to obtain your initial license.

[Trusted's Licensure Guide](#) provides both high-level and in-depth information on how to get licensed in every U.S. state, including a breakdown of the documents required for your application, fees, timeline, and additional resources needed.

However, there are some important things to know about licensing in general, such as general requirements and license types, depending on your state.

License Types

There are two types of RN licenses:

- Compact (also known as the [Nurse Licensure Compact \(NLC\)](#), now entitled the Enhanced Nurse Licensure Compact (eNLC); also known as a multi-state license.
- Non-compact (also known as single-state licensure).

A compact license allows any nurse whose primary state of residence is one of the [32 participating compact states](#) to practice with a multi-state license in any of the states forming the compact state alliance. Holding an active multi-state or compact license means that you don't need to apply for any additional licenses to work in another compact state.

Conversely, a single-state license allows a nurse to practice only within that state. If your primary residence is in a non-compact state, but you still wish to practice in a compact state, you can apply for a single-state license with the corresponding board of nursing.

We've done our best to make navigating this process as easy as possible with our interactive [Trusted Guide to Licensure](#)! It allows you to compare the requirements and processes entailed for each state,

whether you're still deciding on which you'll apply for or planning ahead to see what licensure by endorsement might entail once you've secured that first license.

License Documentation & Process Requirements

As covered in our licensure guide, actual qualifications vary by state. However, below are the common requirements for the application process:

- Disclosure of legal & professional history
(Note: if you have a history of any offenses, it's important to ensure you have all proper documentation and guidance on communication of details from a qualified professional; it's important that you comply and properly disclose everything required to prevent any delay in licensing.)
- Criminal background check, with fingerprinting
- Passport-type photograph
- Official transcripts
- Fees



Continuing Education Units (CEUs)

Nursing school doesn't last forever, but education never ends! You will find your feet under you and feel confident in your clinical skills, judgement, and critical thinking. You will know a lot -- and usually enough -- but you will never know *everything*. There will always be more to learn. Every day is another opportunity to learn something new, determine an alternative solution, or discover a different way of thinking. Continuing Education Units (CEUs) as a requirement are a guarantee that you continue to learn and stay up to date. Beyond the requirement, the key to a fulfilling and progressive career is a perpetual hunger for learning and nursing education. The requirement is just another flame in your fire to become the most knowledgeable professional possible.

You know what they say about death and taxes? Well, if you're a nurse, add nursing CEUs to that list! Health care is an ever-changing industry. It's also an industry where evidence-based practice is not only the gold standard, it's the expectation. When thinking about CEUs, try to adopt this mindset:

"It's my duty as a clinician to be as educated and knowledgeable as I can in order to deliver the safest and highest quality of care to my patients. Being informed and educated enables me to practice responsibly and efficiently."

CEUs are not unique to nurses, as they're also utilized for doctors, engineers, lawyers, certified public accountants, real estate agents, various types of financial advisers, and other professions. They may also be referred to as Continuing Competence Requirements (CCRs).

Various regulatory bodies require that these professionals earn a specific number of CEUs every year or other year to ensure that they are compliant with current practices, meet at least minimum standards for safe practice, and maintain sufficient relevance in order to renew a license. The actual number of CEUs required per license or certification renewal can vary by state, license, and profession. Some states don't even require them at all!

CEUs may be a requirement, but as mentioned above, they're also at the core of personal career growth as a knowledgeable and modern professional. [The Trusted Guide to CEUs](#) has got you covered on everything you need to know about requirements by state for initial and ongoing licensure.

Additional Documents

College Diploma

Scan/take a picture of your diploma and keep it digital. Sure, get a beautiful frame, but you'll want and need a digital copy handy as that is how you'll store and submit it for credentialing and compliance during pre-employment.

Unofficial Transcripts

Request unofficial transcripts in addition to official transcripts. You'll want to keep a digital copy of these on-hand for many years. It's often not as seamless of a process to obtain them years later, so getting them at this point might save you time and trouble down the line when applying for licensure by endorsement to new states.

Many healthcare facilities also require a copy during the credentialing phase of employment.

Health Records

Obtain your health records from your university's Student Health Center and any additional pediatric records you have. You want to be the owner of your records and data, and it can much more difficult to obtain records years after the fact.

Use a credentialing record system, like [Trusted Credentials](#), to store, monitor, and track the expiration of these documents for quick access and continued compliance.

Letters of Recommendation

Request letters of recommendation from your advisor, faculty, or clinical instructors as soon as possible. While some jobs later on might require those letters to be specific to the position, you can have them adjusted later on. Some references may even ask you to write them on your behalf for them to edit - don't be surprised if this happens!

But remember no matter how eager a reference might be to write a recommendation on your behalf, recency can make the process easier on them and will likely increase the quality of it with more tangible and real examples.



STEP 3

Discovering the Right Specialty for You

A career in the nursing profession affords various opportunities by care setting, specialty, role, and type of nursing. Many of these options are a function of which specialty you choose to pursue. Nursing is unique because, for the most part, you can switch specialties and care settings relatively easier than you can in medicine. And you can do so many times over throughout your nursing career. For example, you might be an Emergency Department nurse and then decide to work in Critical Care or Ambulatory Care. With proper orientation and onboarding, you can explore all areas of health care that draw your curiosity.

How to Choose a Nursing Specialty

As a new graduate nurse, selecting a specialty may be daunting. There are many “specialty” quizzes and decision trees out there (none of which are evidence-based). Additionally, you are likely getting bombarded with opinions (the lowest form of evidence) from friends, classmates, and faculty — which is pretty much just as effective as asking someone for a meal recommendation without qualifying whether you even have the same taste! You may have heard old nurse tale of the need to work Medical-Surgical nursing (Med-Surg) for a year before you can pursue other specialties, or that you need to have experience in acute settings before ever considering ambulatory care.

These old nurse tales are, for the most part, falsehoods that should not be the main influence on your decision making for which specialty you initially pursue. This article will share some ways to frame your decision to enable you to make an informed and personal choice that will launch your nursing career on a great trajectory (and the best one for you).

The process of choosing a specialty entails aligning three things: your gut, your passion, and your mind.

Your Gut: Clinical Rotations in Nursing School

Although professional, licensed experience post-graduation is very different from the experience you get in school during your clinical rotations as a student. This experience can help you get a sense of the areas that resonate with you the most.

When reflecting on your clinical rotations, try to remove the preceptor variable (because it can be truly variable) and focus on the actual care delivery, the work flows, and the patient populations.

When doing so, you should consider these two questions:



1. Did the patient population, diagnoses, and treatments interest and stimulate me, and could I see myself interacting with them every day?
2. Did the routine of the care fit my personality (i.e the pace, environment, interdisciplinary team, ratios, acuity)?

These reflective questions help you think about the preliminary feelings you had as a novice in the environment. This is how to identify your gut feeling for where you might want to focus your professional time and work in hospitals.

For example, in nursing school I rotated through the ICU and ED in my last semester. Those were the only two areas where I felt excited, challenged, and where I went above and beyond for assignments. I read more, researched my patients extensively, and I was sad leaving the units at the end of the clinical day. My gut was telling me critical care nursing was the place for me.

When I interviewed for nurse residency programs, I only focused on critical care and ED areas, and it turned out to be an amazing choice. If I had instead relied on advice from my faculty, I likely would have worked Med-Surg first and risked being unhappy because it was not what my gut told me I enjoyed.

Your Passion: Tapping into Your Personality

While your gut gives you a raw sense of where you might want to focus your specialty search, your

personality gives you more insight into your passions. There has been some insightful research done on [how personality aligns with nursing speciality](#). The authors found that personality was not highly correlated to specialty choice but rather with burnout and stress.

Ultimately, your personality assessment should dig into what makes you happy and what fulfills your soul. If you can align happiness and fulfillment you will love your nursing specialty. As a profession, we must rid nursing of the specialty stereotypes we see, hear, and perpetuate. Despite popular belief, detail-oriented nurses make for great ED nurses, and I know some lovely operating room nurses who really do enjoy interacting with patients. These are traits that have been tied to specialties by those who are not fully aware of all the nuances of the work in those areas.

When thinking of your personality, try to focus on things that give you energy and that you're passionate about beyond nursing. Do you like routines or adventure? Do you like surprises or planning? Can you remember details for long periods or do you love to wing it and learn as you go? You can also think about how you make decisions in your life and what you were most drawn to during school. If you enjoy autonomy and working alone, you may not like the team environment of an ICU or ED. If you love fast-paced environments and action but also love influence and politics, you may like the Community Health setting.

Research the settings and obtain insights about your personality from a Myers Briggs, DISC, or even your significant others, friends, and family. Then compare those insights to those identified when going with your gut.

Your Mind: Finding the Never-Ending Challenge

By now, you've likely narrowed your search down to a few areas of interest. Your gut and your personality have connected the dots, and it's time for that last assessment: tapping into your mind.

Professional growth and satisfaction come from being challenged and learning for as long as possible. If work becomes mundane, it can lead to boredom, which is ultimately correlated to burnout. So, for your new review of the specialties you may consider, you need to think about both the subject matter and the mental challenge of the work.

This is going to be different for everyone. It's important to understand that no singular specialty is any "smarter" or "better" than another. They are different.

Many times in the "eat-your-young" culture that nursing is fighting, we assign higher intellect to critical care and less to settings such as mental health or ambulatory clinics. This is not an evidence-based worldview. Each setting has extremely complex and stimulating dynamics that require all nurses to be extremely intelligent.

To tap into what makes your mind buzz, you need to think about the care you will be delivering and assess whether you feel excited *and* challenged by it. Use the following areas to assess your mental stimulation for a given specialty.

1. Do the medications, calculations, and assessments excite me and make me want to learn more?
2. Do the diagnosis and treatment interventions seem challenging and drive me to want to be an expert?
3. Does the patient population present enough diversity of situation to make each day stimulating?
4. Could I do this every single day for 12 hours, five days in a row on nights and still wake up on day six to be excited about another overtime shift? (Okay, maybe this is extreme, but most of the time *can* and *should* be possible!)

Bringing It All Together

Start with a wide net and use your gut to narrow your search down to a few specialties. Take those specialties and research them through nurses actually working within them. Compare their stories to what you enjoy as a person.

Then, narrow your list a little more and think about the intellectual stimulation and career growth you will experience there. You should narrow it down to two or three specialties you might interview for within a new grad residency program. Use these interviews to make your final decision.

There are other things to also consider related to specialty, but they are not as tied to long-term career satisfaction. I have listed them here for consideration in your decision making process:

- Pay differences
- Shift types and hours

- Work environment
- Job market

At the end of the day, your gut, passion, and mind need to thrive... and all the rest will follow.

Education Requirements for Nursing Specialties

One of the great things about the nursing profession is that you can enter many specialties without additional formal education beyond what was required to become an RN. In fact, changing specialties can simply be a matter of being trained and precepted on a unit within the specialty.

For example, if you were to decide to pursue a position in the ED after working in the CVICU, the process could be as straightforward as working with the unit managers to facilitate that switch and training. It may, however, be more difficult in some health care facilities or health systems that require formal programs to formally switch specialties or units.

Specialty Certifications

Each specialty within nursing has its own specialty certification, aside from the certifications required to work within the practice. These are exams that you prepare and sit for, not dissimilar to the NCLEX. The purpose of these certification exams is to validate and confirm your expertise as a practicing nurse in your specialty. After a year or so of practice, you may be ready to sit for specialty-specific certification exams. You can usually take a practice exam to test your knowledge and readiness, either in a study book or online with the certifying organization.

For example, an ICU nurse can acquire enough critical care nursing experience and become certified as a Critical Care Registered Nurse (CCRN). It's not uncommon for nurses to receive a compensation differential for becoming certified. In one study, certified nurses [earned 9% more than non-certified nurses](#). Additionally, [90% of nurse managers](#) would hire a certified nurse over a non-certified nurse (everything else equal). It also helps demonstrate that you are committed, knowledgeable, and passionate about caring for your patients.

Many of the certifications suggest that you practice for a few years before sitting for the exam. There are fees to take the exams, and some only allow retesting a few times in a given year. However, this is a completely personal decision. For example, I sat for the Certified Emergency Nurse exam after one year of practice. It was suggested that a nurse practice for three-four years before taking this exam.

I passed, barely, but became certified on my one-year anniversary of working as a nurse. By studying,

learning from clinical mentors, and taking care of a wide variety of patients, you can accelerate your learning exponentially.

Additional Specialty Certifications

Most specialties require additional certifications for preparation to safely care for the patient population. These are typically easy to obtain or may be a part of hospital onboarding and training programs. For example, if you work in the Emergency Department, you will be required -- at minimum -- to have BLS (Basic Life Saving), ACLS (Advanced Cardiac Life Saving), and PALS (Pediatric Advanced Life Saving) certifications. Some facilities, such as trauma centers, will additionally require TNCC (Trauma Nurse Core Curriculum), MAB/CPI (Crisis Prevention Interventions), or ENPC (Emergency Nurse Pediatric Curriculum) credentials. Each specialty typically has some combination of "alphabet soup" you will need to complete in order to learn and be prepared for anything that might happen within that patient population. You can find a comprehensive list of required certification based on specialty [here](#) as well as an extensive list of nearly all possible certifications [here](#).

In some areas there are nurse education requirements to work in more advanced roles. For example, OR nurses can take classes to become a First Assist. Acute care nurses can learn to be PICC nurses or on the IV team. You can even learn to be a Dialysis nurse or a Wound & Ostomy Care Nurse. Even if you find your specialty doesn't necessarily have a formal nursing program, you can always inquire about extra certifications or courses to enhance your practice.

Common Specializations that require further formal education are:

- Wound/Ostomy Nurse - Certification Program or Master's Degree
- Clinical Nurse Leader - Master's Degree
- Clinical Nurse Specialist - Certification Program
- Nurse Practitioner - Doctoral Degree
- Legal Nurse Consultant - Certification Program
- Certified Diabetic Educator - Clinical hours and Master's Degree
- First Assist - Certification Program
- Nurse Educator - Master's Degree
- Nurse Informaticist - Master's Degree

To find out which certifications are available and what various specialties require, click [here](#).



STEP 4

Finding New Grad Nurse Residency Programs

What is a Nurse Residency Program?

Nurse Residency Programs (also known as New Grad Nurse Programs) are formalized extensions of nursing education and practice that occur within the first year of a registered nurse's career. While all hospitals offer orientation to new grads in their first job, Nurse Residency Programs differ in that they are longer-term, more formalized programs. These programs are usually created and hosted by hospital systems to transition nurses into practice from their academic programs. These programs can last from three months to one year in length and consist of both hands-on and classroom-based learning content on clinical and professional topics.

Why Should I Pursue a Nurse Residency Program?

The American Academy of Nursing (AAN), the American Nursing Credentialing Center (ANCC), and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) have all supported policy that all new graduate nurses should enter into a residency program during their first year of practice. Data shows that nurses that complete residency programs have higher career satisfaction, less burnout and stress, and tend to stay working at their hosting facility for longer periods of time. Those that do not attend residency programs may have less time orienting to clinical nurse practice and subsequently have higher instances of burnout, turnover, and practice issues within the first year of work. One study suggested that new graduates' retention in their first job [went up by between 6% and 10%](#) if they completed a Nurse Residency Program.

Since new grad residency programs can sometimes be hard to find and accepted into -- and they typically improve work satisfaction by only 10% according to the above study -- are there other reasons you should take on the effort of finding and applying to new grad programs?

To start, all hospitals have some sort of orientation for new grads. The residency is just additional content. And overall, 10% retention is actually pretty good for new grads that often leave after one year at their first location. Other benefits include learning and orienting more intentionally to the profession rather than being thrown right in with minimal preparation. Ultimately, it's a great idea to look for your first professional role with an organization that supports you through a transition-to-practice program so you set off on your amazing nursing journey on a foundation of excellence.



How Do I Choose a Residency Program?

While there are several factors that play into the choice of your first professional nursing position, we suggest a few key areas that should inform this important choice.

1. Spend time thinking about where you want to specialize

(Note: if you haven't read our article for choosing a specialty as a new grad, you can [check that out here.](#))

While nursing is flexible and adaptable in regards to moving between care settings, the first setting you enter has a profound impact on your professional self.

For example, during nursing school, I fell in love with the Emergency Department. I could not see myself working anywhere else in the hospital, and despite the fact many faculty and friends said I should start in Med-Surg, I knew that would kill my passion for nursing. So, I found residency programs that allowed new graduate nurses to start in the emergency department. It was the single most impactful choice of my career.

On the other hand, Sarah Gray, Trusted's Founding Clinician, said that when she applied to UCSF, she already had a specialty in mind, but to increase her chances -- because a foot in the door and experience is better than getting turned down for a specialty (and you can always switch later) -- she applied to most specialties in the new grad program and remained open at first.

2. Do research on the facility you are interested in.

One thing I often encounter with new graduate nurses is that many of them pick hospitals by feel rather than with information.

While it may have been great to have been a student at a nearby hospital, working there will be very different. Nursing culture, Magnet Designation, nursing leadership, union vs. non-union, benefits, and financial health are all things you want to consider when choosing a location to practice.

DO NOT be afraid of looking across the country for the best possible place to work. Your first year of practice is foundational to your success as a nurse.

3. Research the facility's new graduate residency program.

Recently there have been two organizations that have begun accrediting residency programs. Accreditation means that a third-party organization has assessed the residency program's content, faculty, outcomes, student satisfaction, and viability and has certified that it meets certain standards.

Both the AACN and the ANCC have accreditation pathways for residency programs to complete. Note that if a program is not accredited, it does not mean the program is lesser than those that have met accreditation standards. Many programs may be in the process of becoming accredited or have chosen to develop a custom pathway for new graduates.

Make sure you ask questions about the curriculum, preceptors, and outcomes of programs to find your best fit!

What Do Accreditation Programs Look Like?

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing has partnered with a company called Vizient to develop a standardized curriculum and accreditation process for New Graduate Residency programs. Additionally, the ANCC has built an accreditation program that aligns with the Magnet Designation requirements that many hospitals are working towards.

You can read an overview of the two programs and what they review review [here \(AACN\)](#) and [here \(ANCC\)](#).

Generally, both programs ensure that residency content focuses on the following:

- Quality and Safety
- Patient and Family-Centered Care
- Management of Patient Care Delivery
- Management of Changing Patient Condition
- Communication and Conflict Management
- Informatics and Technology
- Professional Role and Leadership Skills
- Performance Improvement and Evidence-Based Practice
- Ethical Decision Making
- Stress Management
- Business of Healthcare

They evaluate program success by looking at:

- Retention
- Satisfaction of residents
- Formal feedback mechanisms

Ultimately, you can bet accredited programs will focus on building you as a clinician and a professional.

Am I Eligible For A Residency Program?

While program requirements can vary (make sure you check for each program you're interested in) there are some general ones that you should be aware of.

- You must pass the NCLEX and obtain your license by the hire date
- You might need to meet both of the following criteria (at time of offer) to be eligible for participation in the program:
 - Graduated from an accredited nursing program within the last year; and
 - Completed six months or less of nursing experience in either an inpatient or outpatient setting (i.e. acute care, subacute, home health, long term, school nurse)

Some programs are also limiting admission to BSN graduates as well. The reasoning behind this is that hospitals that wish to achieve Magnet status need a high percentage of BSN-prepared nurses on staff to meet criteria.

They tend to focus on hiring BSN nurses to ensure they maintain this ratio. While this is not ideal for ADN nurses, don't lose hope! There are plenty of residency programs that also admit ADNs!

What is the average acceptance rate for a new graduate program?

This is highly variable by program, and you really need to research the individual application processes to find the answer. Some programs only accept hires once a year, while others accept them twice a year. Some even have rolling admission, which means that if there are positions open year-round, you can onboard into the program at any time.

Do not wait until you graduate to begin looking at deadlines. For [my residency program at UCLA](#), interviews began over six months before the actual program and hire date began. I knew before my last semester of nursing school that I had been accepted, even to the specific unit.

Check out our [resume](#) and [interview](#) guides to help you get your application spruced up to have the greatest impact on the hiring manager and recruiter.

Standing Out When Applying to Nurse Residency Programs

Let's be clear, it's a competitive process to earn a spot in a new graduate residency program. You are likely competing against dozens or even hundreds of applicants who all had similar schooling, grades, and experiences in nursing school. *So, how do you differentiate yourself?*

There are a few paths that you can take in showcasing your life experiences in a way that best resonates with the residency recruiters and hiring managers. There is no "right way," and you should choose a path that speaks to your passions and interests.

Path 1: Geek Out in Clinical

Most advice about securing a residency spot is to ensure that you have clinical experience in the specialty in which you wish to work. Experience can be in your school clinical rotations, volunteering on a selected unit, or shadowing nurses in the specialty. By getting exposed to the unit or speciality, you will gain insights that enhance your ability to interview better.

If you have the opportunity to do clinical rotations in your chosen specialty, make sure that you geek out! Take notes, ask lots of questions, and embed yourself into the culture of the unit. Try to gain as much information you can so that you can demonstrate that you have researched the speciality and can explain why you know it's the one for you.

Path 2: Non-Traditional Experiences

No nursing career follows the same path. Your life is filled with opportunities... so take them! Not every new graduate nurse has the opportunity to rotate through the specialty of their choice, nor get an externship, or even volunteer. Life happens, whether it's family, an opportunity to travel, or some other event that changes your path; it's all going to be great! Many programs look at diverse life experiences as more valuable than actual clinical experience. For example, if you had a passion for volunteering with migrant farmworkers, it shows your dedication to the profession, ability to work without resources, and focus on delivering care to those that need it most.

If you had a chance to travel, you can speak to the growth of learning about other cultures, squashing the travel bug so you can focus on your new job as a nurse, and developing skills in navigating complex and changing environments between countries (not to mention learning another language). The experiences you have outside the clinical space are key to showcasing your amazing abilities and will help hiring managers see you are a truly dynamic nurse.

Additional Factors to Getting Accepted into a Residency Program

It's All About the Network

The key to getting the job of your dreams in any profession is to have an amazing network of people who can support you in your pursuit. This means networking with all sorts of nurses and leaders so that they get to know your passions and see how you might add value to their teams.

Take advantage of your clinical rotations to meet nurses and nurse leaders. You are a student, and people love speaking with students. While you are on clinical rotations, take the opportunity to eat lunch in the break room, ask for introductions to the nurse manager, and shadow charge nurses.

These interactions allow them to put a face to a name and increase the chance they will invite you for an interview.

Attend Nursing Meetups

In many cities, there are nursing meetups where you can go to meet fellow professionals. [Trusted Health hosts them often](#), and you can meet nurses from across the city and country who might help provide insight into your desired hospital, know someone who is hiring, or become a mentor in your new career!

Reach Out

Don't be afraid to reach out to residency program leaders. Many times their emails are on the hospital webpages. Tell them how interested you are, why you think that program is key, and how you plan to apply. Ask for an informational interview to learn more. There is very little downside in sending an email, and the return could be great (you never know until you try)!

Starting Your Career Without a Formal Program

What happens when you either choose not to do a nurse residency program or you do not get into one. First of all, don't stress! All hospitals have some sort of new graduate orientation and support system even if they are not formal residency programs. The key is to find the hospitals with six-month to one-year orientations that allow you to transition into practice.

Choosing your first role is very important. Remember that not all hospitals are the same, and that you need to feel safe, supported, and have access to the skills you need to learn to be successful. Make sure that the orientation and precepted transition to practice is long enough for you to feel comfortable and is built around your personal and professional development.

Here are a few questions we recommend answering when assessing a non-residency new graduate position:

- What is the length of onboarding and preceptorship? Look for at least three months, but six to 12 months is even better.
- Are the preceptors trained to guide you, or are you placed with whomever is working? Focus on jobs with *dedicated preceptors*.
- Are there opportunities for education, training, and certification as you progress?
- Does the unit educator and manager seem supportive of new nurses?

Remember that [you're allowed to be choosy!](#) Don't rush your decision simply to have a job right away. There is a high demand for nurses after all.



STEP 5

Preparing for Your Interview

We know how exciting and intimidating (did we mention exciting?) the hiring process can be as a new grad. You're one step closer to that first job and starting your career as a nurse. Interviews are your opportunity to convey your experience, competencies, and interests in a clear and professional manner. The ability to do this requires an understanding of the process, proper preparation and following best practices. That's why we created this guide to clarify the overall interview process.

Let's start with covering what the process might look like and who is involved.

Interview Process Overview

The Purpose of the Interview

We don't need to reiterate how important and impactful interviews can be - for both future employment but also professional and personal development. But it's worth deeply considering the purpose of the process.

It's a formal, but often brief, opportunity for potential employers and co-workers to understand who you are, what motivates you, how you operate, what your strengths/values are, how they manifest, and why you're passionate about pursuing that particular opportunity.

As a new grad, they're less interested in your clinical exposure and experience (or lack thereof) and more looking to understand your critical thinking and professionalism, what you'll bring to the organization, how quickly you'll be able to learn and adapt, what growth within the organization can and will look like for you, and how you'll amplify strengths and fill gaps.

The other purpose of the interview is an often under-acknowledged one - the opportunity for you to understand if it's an environment and position where you can learn in a supported environment, grow in a way that aligns with your goals, operates along values that align with your own, and requires competencies and responsibilities that are within your qualifications but still challenge you to grow as a professional and individual.



When You Can Expect to Start Interviewing

It's likely that you won't be interviewing until after you've graduated and passed the NCLEX. The rationale for this is that most new grad programs or facilities aren't willing to start the hiring process until you're licensed *and* to ensure that you're qualified to work at the time they're ready to start the process. If you have the opportunity to interview earlier, it's definitely something to pursue.

(If you read the [previous part](#) of our new grad series, you'll remember that some residency programs interview up to six months prior to the hiring date.)

Who's Involved in the Interview Process

Most interviewing processes involve several people, either throughout the various stages or all at once in the form of a panel.

For formal new grad programs, most hospitals conduct panel interviews often comprised of a:

- Charge nurse
- Nurse manager
- Unit or department educators
- Representative from a family council committee (this person may or may not be involved in the interview process depending on the hospital)

Alternative hiring processes typically contain various stages, beginning in Human Resources with a pre-screen, a more formal interview, and ultimately a final in-person interview.

Preparing For Your Interview

If possible, begin preparing at least one to two weeks prior to the scheduled interview. This will give you enough time to do some formal research and become comfortable with the organization as well as enough time to practice a variety of questions and possible answers.

Don't fret about memorizing or knowing how you're going to answer any one question word for word. It's most important that you are prepared to speak knowledgeably and confidently about what you anticipate being asked. This way, it also comes across as more genuine and relatable rather than scripted or forced.

1. Do Your Research

Research the institution, specialty, and patient population. Know specifics about why you want to work there and what you will contribute as an employee there. When you interview, you want to demonstrate that you are knowledgeable and invested (rather than just applying for any job that will hire you). Doing your research beforehand will also demonstrate your competency of diligence - an especially important one for nurses. This can show that you've ensured it's a good fit for you and opportunity to convey that you have taken the initiative to reach out to the appropriate people or resources to find answers.

A highly recommended strategy is to leverage your alumni network to conduct informal interviews about their experiences, career trajectories, places of employment, and advice. It may also be an opportunity to shadow them or have them connect you to a manager or other staff who could also answer questions and round out your perspective.

2. Think About Your Personality & Traits

Whether it's understanding your Myers-Briggs, True Colors, or StrengthsFinders coupled with candid feedback from mentors, family, friends and colleagues, utilize various resources to help you get up close and personal with your strengths and areas where you're not naturally as strong.

Consider five qualities as an employee and human that you hope to express, and spend time thinking about verbal and non-verbal ways in which you can highlight these qualities. Be sure to consider the following:

- Personal strengths
- Weaknesses and areas for improvement you're actively working on
- Professional goals
- Passion and interest for that specific opportunity
- Experience and interest with a particular patient population
- Passions and hobbies and how you are involved and grow these
- Near and long-term professional and personal goals

3. Think of Specific Examples to Potential Questions

Recall experiences to be prepared to provide specific examples for the competencies or situations below:

- Collaboration
- Critical thinking
- Adaptability
- Ability to learn quickly
- Family-centered care or patient advocacy
- Inclusivity and cultural or religious considerations in healthcare delivery
- Communication and conflict resolution
- Research involvement or data analysis

Pare down how you describe these scenarios to keep them clear and concise:

- Use the acronyms SOAR (Situation, Obstacles, Actions, Results) or STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to organize your answers, and try to keep your answers to a two-four minute maximum.
- Think of how to frame your answers in the most positive light possible. If you made a mistake, disagreed with someone, or had a negative experience, do not elaborate on the negative, but be concise in setting the scene to get to the lesson learned and the reason that the experience stretched you in a positive way.
- Practice delivering your answers and modifying them to respond to a variety of questions. Stage mock interviews with friends, friends of friends, or family. Sometimes it's helpful to do mock interviews with strangers - this could be at your university career center or by the arrangement of a friend.

4. Anticipate Follow-Up Questions

Hiring and training a new grad nurse can be an expensive (yet extremely important) endeavor. Consider how you can demonstrate a commitment to learning, how you will optimize your participation in the program, and how you can and will contribute back to the organization (the facility is investing in you, so how are you going to invest in them?).

5. Prepare Your Own Questions

They will be expected. Ensure they're thoughtful, specific to those interviewing you, and are the ones you're genuinely curious about. They should be based on what you have/have not been able to find out from your research (and what information you need to know in order to accept a position). If more pertinent questions come up during the interview, those are great to ask and follow up on.

6. Practice

Practice answering questions, asking questions, introducing yourself, shaking hands, giving an overview of your resume. All of it! You don't want the interview to be the first time you're going through it all top to bottom.

What To Wear

Plan your outfit ahead of time! There are enough variables out of your control but this is one you can have ticked and tied and not have to give a second thought to once decided on. Ultimately, it's important that you are comfortable and whatever you wear helps you to feel confident.

Here are some helpful guidelines:

- It is recommended to wear a suit with a jacket (women included) and closed-toed dress shoes (flats or low heels are usually preferable to heels for comfort, stability, and practicality), especially in a healthcare facility.
- Necklines (or the number of buttons left open) and skirt lengths should be professional.
- It is appropriate (and tasteful) to consider wearing a tie and/or minimal jewelry (especially avoiding facial jewelry), covering tattoos, applying minimal makeup, and cleaning nails/nail beds.

- Wear your hair in such a way that it is not a temptation for fidgeting and does not become a nuisance by falling into your face.

What to Bring

- Multiple copies of your resume
- A notepad or notebook
- Water

Plan Your Day

- Plan the route and mode of transportation well in advance. No matter how awesome you are, showing up late for an interview is a bad look and difficult to recover from. And we all know that there are things out of our control when it comes to transportation and commuting. Plan to give yourself more than enough time. Arriving early gives you the opportunity to post up in a coffee shop or cafe and review notes and calm your nerves.
- Go to bed early, even if your interview isn't in the morning. You'll look and feel your best with sufficient sleep.
- Use the restroom beforehand. Take a couple deep breaths and smile while looking in the mirror. Science shows that the body responds mentally and emotionally to what it does physically.

During the Interview

It's natural to feel nervous in your first interview, but don't stress. Here are some best practices and things to keep in mind as you head into the interview room.

- Smile. Remember that first impressions are important, and smiling will also help to calm and instill confidence.
- Make eye contact with each interviewer and shake their hands firmly, expressing both confidence and warmth. Share your enthusiasm to be there and your appreciation of their time.
- Focus on listening. Try to listen to the questions without getting distracted trying to think of answers at the same time. If needed, summarize the question(s) out loud for clarification (to make sure you understand what is being asked), and then pause if you need to think. Don't be afraid to say, "That is a good question – let me think for a moment" and pause for a few seconds to formulate your thoughts. In fact, it's far better than fumbling through a mediocre or directionless answer to a question.

- Keep it concise. Avoid rambling or feeling like you need to over-answer or explain.
- Shake each interviewer's hand upon your exit and ask for business cards or contact information if you do not already have emails for each person. This will be important for following up.

After the Interview

So, you made it through the interview, but that doesn't mean you're done just yet. There are still a few things left to do to make sure you've made as great an impression as possible with your interviewers.

- Write down your notes, takeaways, and thoughts. Especially any specifics that you will want to refer to in your follow-up notes. Reflect on the interview and any questions that you feel you could have answered better. Consider what each interviewer brought to the conversation or shared about their experience. Ponder your impressions of each person and what it would be like to work with them. Use these ideas to inform your thank-you notes.
- Within 24 hours, but preferably by the end of the business day, draft and send thank-you notes to your interviewer(s). Email your point of contact at the hospital and request the emails. The key will be remembering names (you may consider writing these down as soon as you leave the site of the interview). Thank them for their time and the opportunity to interview. Share something you learned/took away from the experience. Express your continued enthusiasm about the job.
- Wait patiently to hear back, but do not be afraid to follow up if do not hear back within the expected timeframe. The interviewers may not reply to your thank-you emails (none of mine did!), and this does not necessarily reflect on your performance.
- Treat yourself – you worked hard and did your best!



STEP 6

Relocating for Your New Grad Residency Program

You've landed your first job, picked a residency, and figured out all your licensing and credentialing—next up: Party like it's shift change!

Well... not exactly.

It's quite possible that you chose a program far from where you currently live. Picking up your life, packing your coveted possessions, and having to narrow down your wardrobe can be difficult. On top of that, starting a brand new job in a new city can be scary on its own without the additional stress that figuring out housing can cause.

There's a smorgasbord of moving tips that will come in handy as you prepare to embark on your new grad nurse adventure—some trivial and boring, some daunting and time-consuming, but all super important for peace of mind—and, trust us, between saving lives and hang-gliding in Salt Lake City, you'll want all the peace of mind you can get.

Know Your Options

Every individual's housing preferences are different and should depend on what's best for themselves, their lifestyles, their personal/professional goals, and any loved ones joining them on their adventure.

That means that before you start looking at apartments and weekend itineraries in your new destination, you should sit down and take note of the things that are most important to you as well as the activities and experiences that allow you and anyone coming with you to thrive on the daily. We have a handy guide on things to consider that might help you.

You Must Know Yourself to Know What You Want

What makes up your “daily routine?” As a new nurse, you may not think about the activities you do and the experiences you have on a daily basis, but to shape an awesome nurse lifestyle around the factors that help you thrive, you need to first understand *what* those factors are.

Once you understand the factors that must go into maintaining your lifestyle as a new nurse, build on this by figuring out what your nice-to-haves are. People prioritize convenience, new experiences, social opportunities, and a host of factors in-between.



Knowing what’s most important to your housing arrangement from both a big-picture and little-picture perspective is important: it allows you to plan ahead to ensure that you’ll have those factors (or reasonable substitutes) at your new location. And this is an important step in reducing the amount of adjustment you’ll need to deal with as well as getting you closer to a true “home away from home.”

Make sure you have the answers to these questions at the ready when it comes figuring out the preferences that should define your lifestyle and housing arrangements as a new nurse:

- Are you an early riser or prone to sleeping in?
- Do you need external factors (i.e. sunlight, an alarm) to wake up?
- What’s your eating schedule like?
- How often do you do groceries? Do you go to a supermarket or have most supplies delivered to your door?
- Do you food prep any meals? If so, what devices (i.e. blender, crockpot) do you need for your food prep?
- How often do you exercise? What type of exercise do you do? Do you need specific equipment or spaces for this type of exercise?
- Are there certain things that must be walking distance for you (i.e. groceries, laundry, work)?
- Do you have any regular hobbies? Interests? Are you planning on picking up any in the near future?
- How do you tend to spend your days off? Do you prefer to go with the flow or do you crave structured activities?

- Are you more introverted or extroverted?
- Do you need background noise, absolute silence, or something in-between when you're falling asleep?
- What "luxuries" are you willing to stretch your budget for?
- What in your personal life are you hoping to gain from this experience (i.e. travel, increased social circle, trying new foods, etc)?

Know What You Don't Want

Knowing what you don't want (and won't tolerate) in your new location and job is just as important as having a list of what you're hoping for. This is the first step in creating boundaries, which is a healthy way for you to maintain control of your personal and professional life and ensure that you're getting the most you can out of each new assignment.

Creating boundaries not only helps you internally; by having these boundaries clearly set and defined ahead of time, you will set your new journey up for success. Remember, you will be working long shifts, learning new things everyday, and probably going to need to debrief the real life nursing that is coming your way. By setting up your boundaries before you start, you can ensure your stress release and lifestyle needs are set up well in advance.

When thinking about dealbreakers, ask yourself the following questions:

- What factors or measurements do you use to determine a location's safety? Based on these factors and/or measurements, what counts as too unsafe?
- Are you tolerant of noise from your neighbors or the general area? Up to what point?
- What is your budget for large expenses like lodging and daily transportation?
- Is the local cost-of-living within your daily budget?
- When it comes to housing, how far is "too far" from your place of work? A grocery store? A laundromat? A gym? A place of worship?
- Do you require access to specific facilities or professionals (i.e. specialists) for your health or wellness? Within what radius of your home or place of work?
- What amenities can you not live without?

Know Who You're Traveling With

For many new nurses, the adventure of their first clinical role isn't simply for themselves. New nursing with spouses, families, and even friends and pets is becoming more common. As such, it's important to take everyone's needs into consideration when arranging housing and planning your next steps in your new location.

Think about these questions when considering the needs of your travel companion:

- How much space will you and your travel companions need?
- Do any of the people you're with have employment or schooling obligations? How will those needs be fulfilled at your new location?

In addition to these questions above, you should ensure that you know the personal preferences and dealbreakers of any other companions on your adventure! Be prepared to tweak your new nurse lifestyle so that everyone has the factors they need.

Applying What You've Learned

Take the time to honestly answer these questions, and don't be afraid to add and answer more. If you're unsure—or even just looking for a second opinion—ask those around you as well!

Once you have a clear understanding of what conditions help you thrive, you can make arrangements accordingly. Keep your preferences in mind as you make your way through the steps outlined in the rest of this guide: your ultimate goal is to tailor your new nursing experience to encourage the best personal and professional YOU possible!

Over time, these steps (and your understanding of the ways in which your preferences shape them) will become easier, but until then, be sure to read through all of our tips beforehand to help you hit the ground running!

Finding Housing

Your first step when it comes to securing housing as a new nurse should always be to make a budget. While there can be much variation based on the location, don't over extend your finances because you think you will be making more money.

Think about what you can afford reasonably on your new nursing salary. Best practices suggest trying to keep housing costs to 30% or less of your pre-tax income.

Next, study the location. Do you want to be near the job or miles away. School districts, walk scores, food, neighborhoods are all factors to think about. In your first year as a nurse in a residency program you will be spending a significant amount of time at the hospital. Not only do you have your scheduled shifts, many times you are required to take additional trainings, classes, and meetings. It might be nice to live closer to the hospital so that your commute is not a stressor.

When figuring out where you'll be living, you'll want to keep four things in mind: housing type, quality, amenities, location, and flexibility.

Apartment vs. House

While this is a very personal financial decision, reflecting on the numbers. 60% of new graduate nurses leave their job in the first year. Although this is lower for those in residency programs, the reality of nursing usually hits in your first year. You will learn if your chosen speciality is for you, if the hospital culture meshes with your vision, and if the work itself is rewarding. You may even decide to go into travel nursing after your first year.

With all of that to consider, it might be prudent to keep a more temporary housing situation (i.e. apartment) until you become more embedded in the work and the nurse lifestyle.

Quality

When it comes to quality, there's no better barometer than peer reviews! Most apartment options provide the opportunity to read through reviews, whether it's directly associated with the accommodation or through a third party.

We can't stress enough how important it is to rent from someone with a track record of being dependable and reliable. In a brand new place, the last thing you need is your housing arrangement falling through.

Reviews can also be helpful for gleaning details about what others liked or disliked (because sometimes what they didn't like truly wouldn't be relevant to you!) about the area, the living conditions, and what you can't determine from pictures.

Utilities

If you're traveling light because you were living with friends, wanted to dump all your worldly possessions and start over, or dream about living simply, you'll need a spot that's furnished and stocked with linens, kitchenware, and additional necessities. Don't be afraid to ask lots of questions about what is included. And don't simply take labels like "furnished" at face value, as "furnished" means different things to different people.

Consider amenities nearby. If your place doesn't have a washing and drying machine in the building, is there a laundromat nearby, or will you need to get creative with washing your scrubs? More importantly, make sure those amenities actually work *properly*. The only thing worse than not having access to a microwave is being stuck with a fire hazard.

Location

When it comes to housing, we can't talk about things to consider without talking location.

Do you mind dealing with a lengthy commute to work for more affordable or well-situated options? Or would you rather spend as little time as possible commuting? Do you want to live in the middle of the action or away from the noise? Remember, you will be at the hospital A LOT in your first year.

Google Maps (or any maps app/website) and Yelp are your best friends to get a sense of the neighborhoods you'd want to live in and what makes them unique. And don't forget to check out neighborhood safety through reviews online or websites like [AreaVibes](#).

Accessibility

Finally, you may have needs or preferences outside of what's typically found on the market. Maybe you have a pet that you're taking with you. Are you a social butterfly who frequently entertains house guests?

All of these are things to consider *up front*. Ask the property manager or landlord about these points—everyone will be much happier if they’re on the same page as you *before* you sign.

Packing & Moving

Once you’ve confirmed exactly where you’ll be living, the natural next step is figuring out how you (and all your stuff) will get there.

You’ll need to evaluate what packing and moving tips work for you. But for starters, aim for an arrangement that strikes the balance between the comforts of your current housing situation and the idea that you are starting a whole new profession and life. What can you leave behind and what might you need to buy?

From there, you can do your research to check whether those missing pieces can be found in the area for a reasonable price. If they can, you can wait until your arrival to purchase them. Try to do so at nearby thrift stores or consignment shops if appropriate, since you can get a bigger bang for your buck. However, if they aren’t available in the area for a price that won’t break the bank, *then* you should consider taking them with you.

This method isn’t foolproof—you may get to your new place and realize that you underestimated your need for a rice-cooker, or maybe the lightbulb in your bathroom goes out and the building manager isn’t readily available. Until then, this method gets you to your destination with as little baggage as possible.

Moving All of Your Belongings

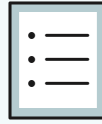
While we recommend traveling as light as possible, ultimately the most important thing is doing what makes you feel comfortable. And there can be various reasons why you need to travel with larger, bulkier, or additional pieces, from nurturing important hobbies to catering to special needs. Moving with family also increases the chance that you’ll need more than you can comfortably carry. Sometimes your new employer will have relocation assistance. Ask your recruiter or hiring manager about options here.

Here are some moving options to consider:

- **Shipping.** You can ship larger items to your location ahead of time or arrange with a family member or friend who currently lives near you to have the item shipped once you arrive. Check out [this page](#) for a list of moving and storage options, or feel free to do your own research!

- **Cargo trailers.** If you're driving between destinations, you can connect a cargo trailer to your car with a tow hitch. And while we're not experts on that method by any means, you can always head over to your closest [U-Haul](#) for more information.
- **Renting a Moving Truck.** If you have limited stuff, renting a moving truck and driving it yourself is a good option. It means some manual labor for loading and packing, but can save you in the long run.

Hopefully this guide serves as a helpful resource for housing, packing, moving and more as a new nurse! Once you've secured your new digs (and packed up your old one!) get ready for your adventure. Read up on your chosen speciality and keep those nursing books readily available as a reference for your learning. Welcome to the profession of nursing. This is just the start of an amazing journey.



STEP 7

What to Expect from Your Nurse Residency Program

So, you've found and been accepted into a nursing residency program. The next several months of your work life will be very exciting. Residency programs will differ but you can expect to move through the program in the following way.

First Two Weeks

Usually, the first two weeks of any nursing program are filled with paperwork and orientation. You will likely get a company orientation on day one and then nursing-specific orientations to follow. These provide you with information on the mission, vision, and values of the organization, and you will get a chance to meet executive leaders across the system. You will also learn about your benefits, company rules, and pay practices. You will also get your badge, which is actually super fun to receive because it's the first official document that has your name *with* RN after it!

Immediately following your orientations will usually be a combination of skill checkoffs, simulation, and EHR training. These will give you the foundations of the nursing practices and equipment used by the hospital or clinic. Take notes, study, and practice as much as you can in these first few weeks.

Month One

Your first month can be really interesting as a new graduate. You will likely have entire shifts where you are not actually caring for patients but rather learning unit specific practices. Try to use this time to learn about all the unit-specific equipment, practice case studies, and observe the work of nurses to really understand how things work. Near the end of this month you will likely begin to work with your clinical preceptors to take on patients.

Months Two - Six

These months are where you really start to feel like a nurse. You will continue to work with your preceptor to take on more complex patients and get certified in more complex things like ACLS, PALS, and other specialty-specific requirements. In most residency programs, you will also be attending formal classes with other residents around nursing care, professionalism, and career growth. Keep learning and growing as a nurse by taking on new challenges in patient care.



Months Six - Twelve

Depending on the length of the program you will be entering the end of residency during these months. Here you will likely have more autonomy in patient care, you've likely finished up your formal course work and are getting ready to get a final evaluation and competency test from your preceptors. This time can be stressful as the clinical preceptorship is very light and you are on your own. Do not worry, you're a badass nurse now, taking care of patients like a rockstar, and giving life-saving tetanus shots with the best of them.

This is a time to do some reflecting about what you have accomplished so far. You're a nurse, and you have learned a TON. Bask in the glory of these final few precepted shifts. Also, begin to prepare for what lies ahead. You may take a knowledge exam to test what you have learned and to rate the residency program. You will also get a comprehensive review from your nurse educator and residency team about your strengths and areas for improvement. Take this seriously as it will help you develop over the years to come. Finally, celebrate! This is a huge step in your life-long career as a nurse!

How to Succeed in a New Graduate Residency Program

The transition to practice from student to licensed professional is difficult but also so much fun! Enjoy the process, ask a boatload of questions, and employ the same skills you used to be successful in nursing school in the new graduate program.

Be sure to keep your textbooks and used them as reference material as you learn more and more in the clinical areas, so that whenever you have a patient with an issue you don't understand, you can quickly look it up. Be sure to lean on your clinical apps and preceptor to get all the information you can. Be a sponge and remember that this program will set you up for *massive* success in the future.

When preparing to get certified, the standard recommendation is to take your certification exam two to four years into practicing, but this is not a hard rule. If you spend this year learning and building your identity as a practicing nurse, it's possible to pass this certification after only one year in your residency program.

By putting in the effort of completing a nursing residency program, you will be the change we all wish to see in healthcare, our patients, and our profession.



STEP 8

Beyond the Bedside: Alternative Nursing Opportunities

While you've likely heard all about the benefits of a new grad residency program, you don't have to wait to be accepted into one, or for the perfect inpatient position, to start using your hard-earned RN license. As explained a bit further in our article on [nurse residency programs](#), new grad programs are often cyclical, highly competitive, and aren't always offered every year. What's most important is that you start working as soon as possible to start building a foundation of knowledge, experience, and skills.

Keep in mind that it's highly unlikely your first job will be your last, and having a variety of experiences through an intensive suite of scenarios will enable you to understand which direction you want to take your career. Alternative nursing opportunities and contract jobs are often overlooked as entry points for new grads but are highly viable and can get you valuable experience right off the bat!

What Are Contract Opportunities?

Contract opportunities, simply put, are nurse positions where you commit to working for a finite period of time. They're temporary opportunities and don't necessarily guarantee a certain amount of work for any given time period.

There is often a lower bar for entry and less competition because they are not being as widely considered, and they take a bit more initiative to pursue. That said, this kind of experience can even help make you more marketable for that perfect position you'd otherwise be holding out for.

It shows initiative, enables you to meet and network with other health professionals, and similar to any other job, it helps you get a foot in the door. Additionally, it can also be a great opportunity to make extra money and gain experience if you're already working at a full-time inpatient opportunity.

Contract opportunities differ in that they don't consist of formal training, mentorship, and oversight in the way a new grad residency program might. Oftentimes, you don't work directly for the healthcare facility but instead for an agency. This can make it easier to get hired because it's somewhat unconventional for new grad nurses, yet agencies must deliver on providing an adequate number of nurses to a facility.



When you do find your most ideal position, you might even maintain one of these opportunities part-time to complement and supplement your work, or to be challenged and stimulated in a different way.

Types of Nursing Contract Opportunities

Start contacting agencies about opportunities for new grads right away. Look for opportunities that are skill-specific, such as flu-shot clinics, BP screening clinics, diabetes patient care as a school nurse, the list goes on.

Flu Shot Clinics

In an effort to get flu compliance from all their employees in the most seamless way possible, medium and large companies often hire an agency to set up flu clinics in the workplace at the front-end of flu season.

This type of opportunity typically requires little to no previous experience (obviously experience handling needles, but hopefully you did that at some point during nursing school!) and the agency will provide all the supplies.

Urgent Care

New grad opportunities in urgent care will often be in triage, physical assessments, preparing rooms, or for assisting in certain procedures and will give you a wide range of experience. You never know what challenge or situation will walk through the door or be required of you!

Home Health

Many home health opportunities for new grads consist of education, diabetes management, post-operative care and check-ins, and wound and dressing changes. These are general nursing skills and experience that would be applicable to any future opportunities.

Clinics (Volunteer or Paid)

Clinics are a great segue into public health, as there are many that offer care to underserved populations that are frequently hiring clinicians - whether paid or volunteer. These are great ways to learn autonomy, some basic assessment skills, how to communicate with non-English-speaking patients, to understand population health (and perhaps the care your future discharged patients will seek) and build rapport with an interdisciplinary team of physicians, social workers, and medical assistants.

Tips & Tricks

Be Optimistic.

It might be your first job, but it certainly won't be your last. Every opportunity is one to learn, regardless of how specific.

Put Yourself Out There.

Don't be discouraged if you don't check every box under a job description. Employers are often ambitious when writing them and don't advertise the true flexibility that exists.

Be Patient.

Being a new grad is a tough but very exciting time. You won't be a pro overnight, within the first week, and probably not within first few months either. Be patient with how quickly you're able to connect certain dots, master tactile skills, or learn how to communicate effectively with various types of patients.