

# INTERVIEWS FOR EXPERIENCED NURSES

A Reference Guide for RN's



# 5 TIPS FOR INTERVIEW SUCCESS

## 1 DRESS PROFESSIONALLY.

Women	Business suit or nice blouse or sweater with dress pants or skirt.
Men	Blazer, dress shirt with tie, slacks
All	Wrinkle-free clothing. Dress shoes (close-toed) safe for walking on hard floors, minimal jewelry and fragrance, perfect hygiene, neat fingernails.

2 **ARRIVE 10 MINUTES EARLY**—but prepare to wait—since priorities in healthcare change quickly. Avoid arriving late and plan ahead for parking challenges. If you are running late, call and let the interviewer know.

If you are still waiting for the interviewer 15 minutes after the scheduled appointment time, politely remind someone in case they were delayed or have forgotten.

## 3 BRING YOUR RESUME.

Email Allison\_Peterson@bshsi.org in Career Services for free resume critique.

4 **SMILE**, shake hands firmly, make eye contact, and introduce yourself when you meet the nurse leader. If this is a group or panel interview, make eye contact with all interviewers when you answer questions.

5 At end of interview, **THANK** all interviewers for their time, express continued interest in the position, and indicate that you look forward to hearing from them once they've made their decision. Follow up with a thank you email or note, re-stating your interest and a fact or two that make you stand out.



# 6 COMMON TOPICS FOR INTERVIEWS & HOW TO HANDLE THEM

## 1 TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF.

This is a common “ice-breaker” to start the interview.

Don’t tell a long, personal history or mention where you were born, your age or marital status.

Instead, prepare a few sentences that summarize your most recent experience. This can also be a brief story explaining how you arrived at this point, and why you’re interested in the specific opening.

### Good Example

“I’ve been an RN for two years at St. Mary’s on SE. I’ve cared for up to 5 post-surgical patients at a time. But I am really interested in advancing to critical care at this point. So I would like to move to the I.C.U.”

### Good Example

“After working in Oncology for several years, I find I am very interested in end-of-life care. I attended the NHPCO conference last fall, and it strengthened my interest in Palliative Care.”

## 2 TELL ME ABOUT YOUR STRENGTHS/WEAKNESSES.

Nursing leaders need to know what you are good at and what sets you apart from other applicants. Everyone possesses strengths. Often, these are qualities about which friends or employers compliment you.

Strengths are things you do naturally well.

Some interviewers also ask about a weakness. Be honest about an area where you have struggled in the past, and how you have worked to improve it.

These questions reveal how well you know yourself.



## TELL ME ABOUT YOUR STRENGTHS (CONT'D)

### EXAMPLES OF STRENGTHS INCLUDE

- **Assertiveness**  
Will you speak up and ask questions when you need to? Can you advocate for your patients?
- **Leadership**  
Do you have a history of leadership? Those patterns often start early and continue throughout life. Give examples, such as Preceptor, Charge Nurse, CCL, committee roles, management experience.
- **Interpersonal Communication**  
Are you effective in handling upset patients or anxious children? Do you train staff, pre-cept new nurses, or speak at conferences?
- **Flexibility**  
Do you adapt to change easily? Give an example.
- **Time Management**  
Give examples of how you manage your time during peak times/high census.
- **Problem Solving**  
Can you “think on your feet?”  
Can you analyze and solve problems? Give examples.
- **Teamwork**  
This is essential in all healthcare roles. Give examples.
- **Detail Orientation/Quality**  
Give examples of catching errors, suggesting process improvements, etc.
- **Stress Management**  
If you seem to handle stress better than most, say so. Give examples.



### 3 GIVES EXAMPLES OF HOW YOU HAVE WORKED ON A TEAM.

Teamwork is one of the most highly valued skills. Be sure to give examples of times when you worked effectively as a team member.

During the interview, the unit director will be thinking...

*"Can this person work with my team?"*

#### Good Example

**“** While working in Pediatrics, I only called out once last year due to the flu. Otherwise, I was among the most dependable nurses in our unit. I even picked up extra shifts at the holidays because my family lives out-of-town. **”**

### 4 DESCRIBE YOUR RELIABILITY.

This means that others can count on you.

Even if you are not asked directly, reliability is a concern in the back of the interviewer's mind. Try to find a way of telling the unit director that if hired, they can count on you to be dependable and committed to doing a quality job.



## 5 WHY WOULD YOU BE THE BEST PERSON FOR THIS JOB?

This question can catch you off guard. A good response may be to highlight one of your strengths again... or an experience that sets you apart from others.

“

### Good Examples

*I have been told by past managers that they value my flexibility and willingness to train others. Sometimes our unit is slow so I am floated to CCU or PTU. I can easily adjust and jump right in to help. I'm quick to see what's needed and get to work. I've precepted 2 students from Bon Secours and 3 from other schools—I like sharing what I know and witnessing their growth during Immersion.*

...

*Having worked as a nurse in both med/surg and post-surgical step-down units, I have a broad range of experiences. In addition, I served on the Safety Committee for 2 years and the Quality Improvement Committee for a year... so I think my unique perspective on quality nursing will be valuable in this role.*

”



## 6 WHAT INTERESTS YOU ABOUT THIS POSITION, OR OUR HOSPITAL?

Draw a connection between yourself and the job or organization. Be prepared to explain how your nursing experience aligns with the opening. Tell how your values are a good “match” for those of the organization. This is commonly asked in Bon Secours interviews. The organization’s web site (home page) is a good place to read about its values and mission.

Bon Secours Mercy Health holds these values: Human Dignity, Compassion, Justice, Integrity, Stewardship and Service.

“

### Good Examples

*I share your hospital's value of human dignity. I believe that every patient deserves quality care and to be treated as an individual. Regardless of what another nurse tells me about my patient. I try to maintain an open mind.*

...

*I noticed on your web site that your hospital is a leader in cardiac surgery. I am very interested in working with cardiac patients after being in med/surg for 3 years.*

”



## SITUATIONAL INTERVIEWS

### SITUATIONAL INTERVIEWS GIVE YOU A CHANCE TO TELL YOUR STORY

The Situational (or Behavioral) Interview is a common interview style. Questions prompt you to recall stories from the past, like “Think about a time when xyz happened. How did you handle it?” Give yourself a moment to think of the best possible answer—and then respond with a short story.

#### Examples

- 1 Describe the biggest challenge you have faced in your job and how you handled it.  
...
- 2 Tell me about a clinical situation where you had to demonstrate creative problem solving.  
...
- 3 Tell me about a time you’ve received constructive criticism from a manager or supervisor. What happened and how did you respond to it?

Tell a short story in your response.

If you have never encountered the situation as described, say so, but offer your best explanation of how you *would* handle it if it occurred.





## SITUATIONAL INTERVIEWS (CONT'D)

### WAYS TO PREPARE FOR SITUATIONAL INTERVIEWS

- Analyze the job posting, paying attention to the skills required.
- Read over your own resume and recall past jobs.
- Rehearse brief stories—think of at least two—one that describes your problem-solving skills, and one concerning your communication skills.

### OTHER POPULAR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

“

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

...

What is your 5 year Plan?

”



## PEER OR PANEL INTERVIEWS

Peer (or Panel) Interviews involve a group of employees interviewing the job candidate. These are recommended as a best practice by many in the field of human resources and are common in healthcare. Here are specific suggestions:

- 1** Arrive 10 minutes early, but be prepared to wait. It sometimes takes longer than expected to gather a group together, even if they have this appointment on their calendar.
- 2** Smile and take a deep breath before entering the room. Everything you've done up to this point has prepared you.
- 3** When you are introduced, try to shake hands and introduce yourself if the space permits it and if the group seems receptive. If the room is crowded or no one makes a move in your direction, just smile and be seated. (You can always shake hands at the end if appropriate.)
- 4** It's OK to say that you're nervous. Most job candidates are! The group will usually act friendlier and less threatening if you go ahead and just admit it. They don't want you to be nervous.

Typically, group members will take turns asking questions. If the group has not interviewed together before, it can feel awkward. Knowing this can alleviate the fear that you are giving bad answers.



As you respond to interview questions, make eye contact with all the group members. Don't just look at the person asking the question.

**5** Give yourself a moment to think of the best answer before responding to the question. Ask for the question to be repeated if necessary.

**6** If it is a multi-part question, answer it to the best of your ability and then say, "Did I answer that completely?" or "Did I cover everything you asked?"



## QUESTIONS TO ASK AT THE END OF YOUR INTERVIEW

At the end of the interview, the interviewer will probably ask if you have any questions. Your questions further reveal your degree of interest in the job. Consider asking a few questions along these lines, if this information has not been given during the conversation.



**From your perspective, what qualities are needed in order to be successful in this role?**

...

By asking, you can determine if you'll be able to give what the job demands.



**What advice do you have for a nurse who is new to this role?**

...

This gives insight into what the interviewer feels is important.



**How many nurses will I be supervising?  
How many physicians will I be supporting?**



**I would like to get certified/attend the xyz conference/etc. Is that possible if I am selected?**



**How can I advance if I am selected for a position in your department?**

...

This reflects positively on you, because it implies that you intend to continue striving to improve.



**Will you be inviting candidates back for additional interviews?**



**Do you have concerns about hiring me, given my level of experience?**



#### **Additional Information**

- Ask Human Resources about benefits, salaries and vacation/PTO.
- Ask the Unit Director/Chief Nurse Executives about shifts, work requirements, advancement opportunities, performance evaluations, and support staff.



## BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER



**NOTES**

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The Office of Career Services offers support in many areas, including:

Career preparation, employment opportunities, interview practice, resume assistance, and graduate school research.

These services are free and available to all students and alumni of the College. The Career Counselor can assist you by phone, email, in person or SKYPE.

For more information, please contact:

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