

Your First Position in Nursing

Realities of the Current Job Market



The National League for Nursing and the National Student Nurses' Association are keenly aware of the entry-level job situation for new graduates. We are providing this resource to help you prepare for a very competitive job market.

What are the facts?

- Although there is a shortage of registered nurses, the economic recession has flooded the RN market with experienced nurses who were retired, planning to retire, or went from part-time to full-time employment.
- The need for RNs has declined due to low hospital census (resulting from lower elective surgeries/procedures; high unemployment; and high rate of those without health insurance).
- Employers are hiring new graduates with baccalaureate degrees; new grads with associate degrees and diplomas are having more difficulty finding entry-level employment.
- Many open RN positions require at least 2 years of experience.
- Graduations from nursing school are at an all-time high.
- New graduates are expensive to orient and many move on to other employers after only 1-2 years, which adds to the cost of recruiting and orienting new employees. There has been an increase in RN retention due to economic factors—nurses are staying in their current positions.
- Once the economy improves and unemployment decreases, the shortage of RNs will become critical.

What can you do?

- As a nursing student, work as a certified nursing assistant (CNA) this will get your “foot in the door” and you will gain valuable experience. Be sure to make a good impression and get to know your coworkers and managers.
- This is a great time to continue your education—if you have a diploma or associate degree, explore RN to BSN and RN to MSN programs; if you have a BSN, explore masters degree in nursing programs. Many programs are available online. Some of the RN completion programs require students to work while in the program and they receive credit for their clinical hours.

- Before you graduate: Meet with your college/university career services department (submit your name and resume to their data base) at least one semester or quarter prior to graduation and follow-up 2 weeks prior to commencement. Introduce yourself to the alumni chapter members of your educational institution; attend meetings and ask them to help you find your first job.
- Always include a cover letter when you submit your resumé and application. When you do get an interview, make a great impression through your professional appearance and interviewing skills. Practice interviewing skills and get an interview coach/mentor. This can be any seasoned nurse who can practice with you.
- Keep in contact with your mentor. If you don't have a mentor, seek one out. All of the suggestions addressed here can be executed more easily with the assistance of a mentor.
- Take the licensure exam as soon as possible after graduation. Most hiring agencies will not consider your application unless you have passed NCLEX.
- Check with the state board of nursing in your state to learn the rules and regulations for RNs to work in other roles (i.e. CNA). Note that if there are Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurse positions available you may want to check with the state board of nursing to see if it is feasible for you to be licensed for this role (until RN positions open up). Remember that if you are licensed as an RN and working in a different role, you will be held to the higher standard (that of an RN)—so you must be careful to practice in the role and job description that you are hired for.
- Join a professional nurses association (i.e., the American Nurses Association and/or state nurses' association; specialty nursing organizations) and network with members—let them know you are seeking employment. Finding a job may rely on who knows you and what you can do, more than anything else.
- Be open and flexible—you may not get the position you want, but finding an entry-level position that will give you experience and professional-growth opportunities as well as health insurance

benefits, is essential. (Note that NSNA's health insurance benefit can be extended for 9 months after graduation as long as you are enrolled in the insurance plan as a student.)

- Look outside of the acute-care setting for entry-level positions such as long-term care; rehabilitation setting; community health; camp and school nursing; veteran administration hospitals and facilities; local and state departments of health; agency work; wellness work-sites or employee or college/university health center.
- Even if a residency or internship is not in your specialty interest area and pays less than other positions, still consider taking the position if it is offered to you. Being employed as a nurse is your highest priority. Note that some residency and internship programs are very competitive. Many of these programs work with specific schools (i.e., schools that do clinical rotations at their facility) and these students receive priority placement (if positions remain available, then they look at other new grads).
- Consider career enhancing opportunities to gain clinical experience (i.e., mission work; international opportunities; assisting your mentor with research).
- Cultivate relationships and stay connected to every nurse and healthcare worker that you know and keep them up-to-date about your job search. Networking is the key to awareness of employment opportunities.
- Stay current through continuing education and consider taking the time to complete certification opportunities.
- If you are not tied to your community, move to where the jobs are. If you are tied to your community, consider asking your family to help you make this next step of relocating temporarily or working away from home and returning at designated times. Use family and friends in other areas of your town, city or state as possible contacts for help in arranging a new temporary or permanent residence to acquire jobs where there is a greater need for new graduates.
- Routinely check websites, newspapers, the NSNA Career Center, and nursing publications for job availability. Check the hospital or agency web sites daily as this is where job openings are often first announced.



- Make sure that your resumé truly reflects your education, skills and experience. If you are an active NSNA or community leader, this is important to include. Review your resumé and any job applications with your mentor.
- Purchase an “interview business suit and shoes” and be sure to look professional when you land an interview.
- Be sure that you know the terms of student loans. Check to see if there is any way you can delay your student loan repayment until you are employed. Also check into loan forgiveness programs.
- Be very aware of the early signs of burnout and be sure to address them. Develop good relationships with your nurse manager and co-workers and always ask for assistance when you need it.
- Let your school of nursing know about the hiring situation in your area so that they can use this data to strategically plan for the number of enrollments.

Do not give up nursing! We know that there is a nursing shortage looming and this is a temporary situation. Keep your nursing passion alive and take every opportunity to progress in your nursing education and develop your professional identity.

Resources for further information:

Inspiration

View NSNA's video *Nursing—the Career for a Lifetime* online at: www.nсна.org/career/ultimate_adventure.asp
Your First Year as a Nurse: Making the Transition from Total Novice to Successful Professional (Paperback) by **Donna Cardillo, RN**

NSNA Career Center

www.nсна.org/career/ultimate_adventure.asp

National League for Nursing

www.nln.org

Volunteer Abroad (listing of various international opportunities)

www.volunteerabroad.com/listings.cfm/volunteertypeID/82

Professional Attire resource

www.nсна.org/meetings/guidelines_attire.asp

Resumé resources

Critical Portfolio (electronic, web-based professional portfolio)
www.nснаleadershipu.org
(free for NSNA members)

Interview resources

www.nursingspectrum.com/StudentsCorner/StudentFeatures/TenKillerInterview.htm

Loan Repayment

www.hrsa.gov/loanscholarships/repayment/nursing

September/October 2009 *Dean's Notes* (report of NSNA's 2009 survey of new nurse graduates)

www.ajj.com/services/publishing/deansnotes/sepoct09.pdf

Prepared by: Dr. Beverly Malone, NLN CEO; Dr. Elaine Tagliareni, NLN Past President; Kenya Haney, NSNA President; Dr. Cheryl Taylor, NLN-appointed consultant to NSNA; and Dr. Diane Mancino, NSNA Executive Director.