Interview Questions for Nursing Posts
“Always remember that an interview is a formal process. Even if you have had a clinical placement on a ward where you are being interviewed for a job you should behave as if you have never met the interviewers before.”

Ward Manager – Aintree Hospital
Background

To compile this factsheet a number of ward managers were interviewed across a wide range of specialisms, including a unit working with younger people with learning disabilities, a coronary care ward, general surgery, orthopaedics and the Trust personnel department.

It seems that whatever the area to which you are applying, the questions asked at interview can be similar. They may have a slightly different emphasis placed on them according to the area of work so that you should aim to answer the questions in the context of the job to which you are applying, but on the whole staff are trying to find out quite similar information.

Prior to the interview

Where the opportunity is offered, you should try to make an informal pre-interview visit. You really can learn things to help you with your application and it also gives you chance to look at the unit or ward at work and help you to decide whether you would like to work there. It may also help you at interview when you are trying to transfer your experiences to answer the questions related to the job for which you have applied. It is likely that the Ward Manager will show you around on an informal visit so you ought to have the chance to ask questions. If the hospital / department is one where you have already spent time on clinical placement then a visit should not be necessary.

Once you have received the application form and supporting information, you can start to look at how you can match yourself to the person specification and job details. For each post for which you apply you should get a job description and person specification plus extra information about the Trust itself. When thinking about matching yourself to the job requirements, you should also go back to look at the original advertisement to see what was stated there.

Before you start to complete the application form and supporting information, you need to think carefully about the job in question. (More information on how to do this is contained in ‘How to apply for a Nursing Post’ booklet). The supporting information which you include in your application should reflect the requirements of the person specification. When your application is looked at by the interviewing panel, they will be checking to see whether you have matched yourself to the person specification criteria.

Generally it should not be necessary to send in a CV unless it is specifically stated that this is required. Take great care with the general presentation of your application, including punctuation, grammar and spelling.

Be careful never to write about things you have not done and try not to exaggerate the truth as you may well be asked to talk in detail about some of these things at interview. Make sure that you fill in all sections of the application form and, if a section does not apply to you, write ‘Not Applicable’
rather than leaving it blank. If there is not room to fit something in and you are enclosing a CV, write 'See enclosed CV

The names of people to approach for references will be given on the application form. A comment was made that occasionally the choice of references for newly qualified nurses could be quite surprising. One of the references will be a university tutor, but it is the second reference that is sometimes difficult. On occasions newly qualified nurses have given the names of fairly junior nurses as the second referee when it would be much better to give the name of a Ward Manager. Obviously you need to ask permission before you give the names of your referees.

The Interview

Preparation before the interview is essential – Interviewers may even ask what you have done to prepare for the interview and by that they may mean:

- Have you visited the ward or the unit?
- Are you familiar with the person specification and job description?
- Have you read anything about the area to which you are applying.
- Have you spoken to people who work in similar areas of expertise.
- What do you know about the Trust itself and its policies and achievements? Have you looked at the trust’s web site or Googled for news items about the trust.

Any personnel department ought to be able to provide further information on the Trust or organization. Keep your eyes open also for articles in professional journals and newspapers for topical issues. You should certainly have taken a copy of your CV and application form so that you can familiarise yourself with it before the interview.

Do not plan your answers word for word as this is likely to make your answers seem stilted and too rehearsed. Just think about some of the themes and areas, clarify your thoughts and opinions but do not overplan.

It is important to look smart and make the effort accordingly to dress appropriately for your interview. It is important to wear something in which you feel comfortable and not self-conscious.

There are not likely to be any trick questions – most reasonable people will realise that you will be nervous and they are not trying to catch you out. They would prefer you to be as much your normal self as you can. The interview panel will probably consist of two or three people and can be as short as twenty minutes or as long as an hour. Everyone will be assessed against the same criteria. Interviewers do not really want to see you struggling – they will try to help you out with extra prompt questions. Also, if you are unsure of what the interviewer is getting at, don’t be afraid to ask them to rephrase or clarify or, if you feel you need a moment or two to collect your thoughts, ask for a couple of seconds thinking time. This is better than just saying the first thing that comes into your head.
Examples of interview questions

General

- Tell us about yourself – what attracted you to this job?
- What would you hope to learn from your first post as a nurse?
- What skills can you bring to this job?
- How would you evaluate your training needs?
- What qualities should a good team player have?
- How would you deal with conflict in a team?
- What makes effective communication?
- Questions around the importance of documentation/record keeping
- What have you done to prepare for this interview?
- How might you educate patients into a healthier way of life?
- What is your view on the expanded role of the nurse?
- How do you feel about clinical supervision in the workplace?
- What are the benefits of clinical supervision in the workplace?
- For what do you think you will be accountable in this post?
- What do you understand by accountability?
- Why do you want to work here/ in this Trust/ on this unit?
- What made you decide to enter nurse training?
- What would you like to see in your induction to the ward?
- How would you orientate a newly qualified student to the ward?
- How do you feel about appraisal?
- How would you prioritise your duties when you first come on shift if someone has rung in sick and you are short staffed?
- How do you maintain good channels of communication?
- What experience have you had to date of team work/delegating/sharing responsibility etc?
- What personal qualities do you have that make you suitable for this post?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- How would you measure good standards of care?
- How are you going to act for the patient?
- Do you have any questions for us?

Specific questions for the post

- What do you already know about this area of work?
- Why have you chosen this particular specialism?
- What evidence have you got to demonstrate that you have the criteria that we are looking for in this post?
- Why have you applied to this particular trust/hospital?
- Have you read any pieces of research that you could apply in this setting/unit/ward?
What have you read recently that has influenced your practice?
What experiences has your training given you to prepare you for working in cardiology/ A&E / (or whatever the job is)?
What clinical skills can you bring to the ward/unit?
What do you see as the role of the staff nurse on this unit?
How do you see your career path developing over the next two years?
How would you describe your ideal line manager?

Studies and Practical Experience

What criteria did you use to decide where to study nursing?
What has been your best piece of work? Why?
Can you tell me three things that you have learnt from your practice.
Can you give an example of some good practice that you have seen?
How do you see your role changing as you start work?
What are the key responsibilities that you have had whilst on placement?
Tell us about the least satisfying aspects of your most recent placement.
Tell us about something that you have read recently in professional journals and why it interested you.
How are you going to keep up to date with PREP?

Issues and Trends

What do you think of the Trust’s (or hospital’s) Corporate Objectives/Mission Statement?
What would you do if there was a complaint?
What would you do if there is a controlled drug missing?
What are the current issues in healthcare?
What pieces of current legislation are going to affect your future practice.
If a patient’s relative was causing a disturbance on the ward, what would you do?
How do you share your professional expertise with others?
How do you monitor and evaluate your professional competence?

Children’s Nursing

As a registered sick children’s nurse, you will be responsible for untrained staff, such as care assistants. How do you feel about this?

You will be working in a team of professionals – what support will you be able to give to your manager/other members of your team.

Who is responsible for the morale on the ward?
Confidentiality issues are particularly important when dealing with children, their parents and wider family. How might you handle these?

You will often be sharing the care of the child with the parents. How might you organise this?

There may be questions about clinical governance.

What role would you play in the audit process and how important do you think it is?

How do you know that the standards of care are good on the unit in which you are working?

How will you keep up to date with current practice?

**Learning Disability**

Shift work can cause communication problems – how might you resolve this?

What basic steps do you take to write a care plan for someone with learning disabilities?

What are the essential ingredients in multi-disciplinary team work?

Why is it important to modify your approach to different patients and carers?

How would you avoid being manipulated by a client with whom you are working?

How would you deal with a situation where a family was hindering a client in areas of independence?

Questions may be framed around your knowledge of the Children’s Act or Mental Health Act.

What is challenging behaviour and how would you deal with it?

**Mental Health**

There may be clinical questions around psychiatric medication and the signs and symptoms of medication i.e. the interviewers may pick a drug commonly used such as lithium carbonate and ask you to tell them about it.

Questions about the Mental Health Act – maybe a general question such as ‘Give us an idea about the common sections that will be used on an acute psychiatric unit’. The interviewers may then ask more specifically about Sections 54 and 17. The interviewers will not expect very detailed knowledge
at this time, but a basic understanding of how they might be applied. You might be given scenario questions to find out your knowledge of this such as ‘One of the patients wants to leave the ward but they are detained under Section 3. What do you understand by this?’

What are the key components of the care programme approach? As a ward based nurse what is your role? – again here a basic understanding will be required of how this works.

Are you familiar with any validated assessment tools?

What do you understand is the role of a key worker?

You may be given a scenario such as – ‘As a community nurse you might be asked to assess a patient whose family feel he/she is at risk. How would you assess the risk?’ Other scenario questions might be such as ‘you are on the ward and there is a situation of aggression between two patients on the ward – how would you deal with it?’ There might be something on national policy regarding mental health, especially if there are things in the news at the time, such as care in the community.

**Questions from you**

There is always an opportunity at the end of an interview for you to ask questions. It is not compulsory but it is an opportunity to find out a bit more. You can use this chance to find out things you genuinely want to know rather than just to ask questions for the sake of it. It is a time to be positive – you could ask about opportunities for personal and professional development, preceptorship, any possibilities of internal rotation if applicable, induction programmes, clinical supervision or simply by what means and by when will you be told about the outcome of interview. If anything has not been clarified during the interview, you could take this opportunity to check it out. Be prepared with your questions but make sure you are not asking things that have obviously already been answered in the course of the day or in the information sent out to you. It sometimes helps to have written down the questions you may want to ask to jog your memory at the time.

**The Personal Profile/Portfolio**

You may be asked to bring along your personal profile / portfolio to the interview and as your career progresses this is something you will need to regularly update. Depending on how the interview is structured, you may or may not have the chance to show your portfolio. The profile is likely to contain information such as your CV, previous and current work experience, education, training and professional development, initiatives, achievements, philosophy of care, clinical placement reports etc. Presentation is important and it is very much a document for reflective practice. You need to think
about what you have gained from various experiences and be able to comment on it. It would be worth maybe having a front page with a summary sheet to make the reading easier and you might think about the parts of the portfolio that you think have particular relevance to the job for which you are being interviewed so when you hand it over you could draw their attention to the parts that have particular relevance to them as interviewers.

**After the Interview**

Whatever happens at the interview, do not agonise over what you either did or did not say. Each interview is a learning experience. One thing it might be useful to do, however, is to note down some of the questions you were asked for future reference and if there was anything that particularly confused you because you just had not thought about it prior to interview – then give it some thought and develop your ideas should the same question come up again at subsequent interviews.

If you are not successful and are not offered the post, it can be for a wide variety of reasons. Try to get some post interview feedback from the panel to help identify any weak areas and also to point out what you have done well. Ask the person who telephones to let you know the results of the interview, if they can give you some feedback there and then. or whether they could ring you back at a later date. If you are notified by post, there will be a contact name on the letter.

This booklet has been written by Jacqui Howe
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Updated by Des Hope
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