How to prepare for your first job interview

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Possible questions your interviewer might ask
Practical advice for preparing for interview

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Newly qualified nurses can increase their chances of being successful at job interviews by demonstrating they have the qualities sought and are committed and up to date with clinical research and issues affecting nursing.

The prospect of landing your first job in a nursing career can be daunting, particularly if you are unfamiliar with the interview process and the types of questions you might be asked and are unsure how to prepare. While it is not possible to predict exactly what you will be asked, you can make educated guesses and being prepared will help with nerves. While you will have to think up a lot of your answers on the spot, there are some questions, or types of questions, that interviewers are more likely to ask.

Typical questions
Why should we employ you?
Most interviewers are likely to ask: “Why should we employ you?” or something similar. They want to know whether you have the qualities they are looking for.

Human relations manager for a large public institution Georgina Breslin says this is the most important part of any interview. She says: “This is where you get the chance to win them over. Take your time, and think beforehand about what they want to hear.”

The person specification can help you prepare. It outlines the qualities of their ideal candidate so use it to plan how you will answer this question. Make sure you tick off everything they are looking for and give examples of how you meet each requirement.

“Just telling them how great you are isn’t enough,” says Ms Breslin. “Back everything up with evidence. Anyone can say they’re a good team player but this means nothing without an example of how you work well in a team.”

Think of examples of when you have demonstrated the following:
» Worked well within a team, including with different professionals;
» Communicated well with staff, patients and the multidisciplinary team;
» Showed familiarity with commonly used drugs, side-effects and contraindications;
» Remained calm under pressure;
» Used current evidence to influence or improve your understanding of nursing practice.

What would you do if…?
In a nursing interview, you are likely to be asked about specific scenarios. On the surface, these appear difficult to prepare for; however, you have spent the last three years learning what to do in different situations. Remain calm, listen carefully to the question and think practically about what you would do, asking for clarification if necessary.

“So many people when asked a scenario question will instantly look for the trick and over complicate their answer,” Ms Breslin says. “But interviewers aren’t there to trick you – they want to hear that you will do the obvious things.”

Make sure you mention the details, no matter how obvious they might seem. If your first step would be telling the rest of...
always have a funny story in your back pocket

Terry Bryan p24

box 1. doing your research

We’ve arranged all our practice articles, news and opinion by clinical zone on the Nursing Times website. So, if you are going for a job in a cardiology unit, for example, you can find the latest research relating to this specialty easily.

» Go to nursingtimes.net/nursing-practice/clinical-zones

the team what’s going on or maintaining a patient’s dignity, say so.

» Have a think about what you would do in the following situations:

» A healthcare assistant disagrees with a decision you have made;

» You suspect a colleague has been drinking alcohol before coming on shift;

» You notice that a patient has been given the wrong dose of insulin;

» A patient is wanting to discharge themselves against medical advice.

research evidence behind practice

Quoting current research will impress a potential employer, particularly if you can explain how it might influence your practice or change your way of working.

Look for literature reviews and recent research relating to the job’s specialty. Ms Breslin sees this part of the interview as an opportunity to show how eager you are. She says: “Ask yourself why this research is interesting – if you can show passion for it and the benefits it will bring your patients, employers can see that you understand the importance of evidence-based practice. And that you really want this job.”

Legislation and nursing news

“These days, employers are looking for someone who understands the role,” says Ms Breslin. “Not only should applicants be able to do the job, but they should also know about the external factors that affect it. They may ask you for your thoughts on a high-profile news story or report.”

Take the time to read about what has been happening in the world of nursing. Before you search for information on the specialty, look at wider nursing issues. Our homepage (www.nursingtimes.net) is full of the latest news and highlights special reviews or news items of interest.

Read up on:

» The Francis report;

» The government response to Francis;

» The chief nursing officer for England’s 6Cs – you should be able to recite these

and relate them to your practice;

» The Keogh review;

» National Institute of Health and Care Excellence guidelines relating to your area of nursing;

» Other reports or government legislation relating to your specialty.

Top tips

Get some sleep

The night before your interview, it can be tempting to stay up late to prepare but, realistically, being able to think clearly is much more beneficial than knowing every last detail of the Francis report. Accept that you have done as much as you can and go to bed.

Consider what to wear

Ensure you look professional. The panel are likely to be seeing several people and will remember what makes candidates stand out. Make sure they remember you for your up-to-date nursing knowledge, not your too casual outfit.

Practise

Ask a friend to go over possible questions with you to practise thinking on your feet or, even better, do this with your mentor or another nurse or someone who has been an interviewer themselves.

Smile

While employers will decide whether to employ you based on your competence and values, they are also looking for someone who they want to work with. Be open and friendly, admit to being nervous and emphasise that although you are new to nursing you are keen to learn.

Box 2. know key figures

Politics affects frontline nursing and will affect your practice. It helps to know who is making and influencing decisions:

» Jane Cummings – chief nursing officer (CNO) for England

» Ros Moore – CNO for Scotland

» Jean White – CNO for Wales

» Charlotte McArdle – CNO for Northern Ireland

» Viv Bennett – director of nursing at Public Health England and Department of Health

» Jeremy Hunt – health secretary

» Peter Carter – chief executive and general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing

Box 3. interview checklist

- Read the person specification
- Practise answering scenario questions
- Look for literature reviews and recent research relating to your specialty
- Be familiar with current policy and the latest nursing news
- Check what you have been asked to bring to the interview
- Check where you need to go and allow plenty of time to get there
- Think about what you will wear
- Get a good night’s sleep the night before the interview

Find out how to get to the interview

Double-check where your interview will take place and make sure you know exactly where you are going. Getting lost and being late will not only leave a bad impression but will leave you flustered.

Check what to bring

When you were invited to interview, it is likely you were asked to bring certain items, such as a form of identification or your personal portfolio. Turning up without any of these items shows you are unable to follow instructions.

The best way to combat nerves, and to give you the best chance of getting the job, is to put the work in beforehand. Those interviewing you will understand that you are nervous, so take your time, ask for clarification if necessary and hold your head up high – after all your hard work over the past three years, you deserve to be there.

Box 4. useful links

- The Francis report tinyurl.com/NT-francis
- The chief nursing officer for England’s 6Cs tinyurl.com/NT-6C-section
- The Keogh review tinyurl.com/NT-keogh
- National Institute of Health and Care Excellence guidelines relating to your area of nursing www.nice.org.uk
- Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network www.sign.ac.uk
- Nursing Times clinical zone nursingtimes.net/nursing-practice/clinical-zones

Visits by Terry Bryan to procurement processes are arranged by editorial. Although we aim to present a multinational view, it is not possible to cover all aspects of procurement activity in detail and some aspects may be covered more than others.

www.nursingtimes.net / Vol 109 No 37 / Nursing Times 18.09.13 15