

How to Land Your Nursing Dream Job

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Whether you are job searching as a new graduate APRN, or just thinking about your next step in your nursing career, it's exciting to "dream" about your next job and career opportunity. There are several strategies to help you land interviews (and hopefully job offers) in your area of expertise!! Here are a couple "pro-active" job search strategies that I've recommended to our RNs and APRNs that have worked!!!

1. **Update and Strengthen Your Resume and Cover Letter**– You don't want to just add your new BSN or MSN/DNP/Ph.D. graduate degree to your credentials on your resume and cover letter, you will want to add your experience and expertise that you've gained during your undergraduate or graduate work as an APRN, Nurse Educator, or Nursing student. This could also include your capstone project (title written in APA format) as well as your related nursing clinical experiences. I've worked with several APRN candidates that didn't put all of their APRN clinical experiences, and wondered why they never got any interviews. Same with our recent graduates. By adding these the reader can see your experience as a graduate APRN student or new graduate. To review some resume and cover letter examples, please visit the UK Nursing Career Center web page: <http://www.ukhealthcare.uky.edu/nursing/career-center/>
2. **Linked In**: Linked In is a professional social media networking tool that many job seekers have found "connections" to other professionals that are working in various specializations, medical centers, clinics or hospitals. Like anything you put on social media, make sure it's classy, and professional. Social media can "make or break" your career!!
3. **Letters of Recommendation**: When a new APRN or new graduate nurse is job searching, I tell them to go ahead and get a couple (1 or 2) strong letters of recommendation from a faculty member or clinical supervisor that can speak on your behalf as a new APRN or BSN graduate. Normally at the point of job application you won't need to submit letters of recommendation, just providing a list of 3 or 4 professional references is usually all that's required. In the case of job seekers, I tell my students to "attach" a letter of recommendation to their applications (along with their cover letter and resume/CV). Nurse Recruiters or Human Resource Professionals **will read them**....since you are competing against other APRN or BSN nursing students whom might be very familiar with area hospitals or medical centers (i.e., through working there, or through their clinical rotations), you are "not well known." When **asking** someone to write you a letter of recommendation make sure you get a STRONG letter that speaks to your skills abilities, competencies, work ethic, leadership, etc. Give them your resume or CV.....and tell them the type of job you've applied for so they can write to your strengths in oncology, pediatrics, critical care, etc. You might ask one of your faculty, a nursing clinical instructor, Patient Care Manager (or Assistant Manager) or someone professionally that knows you VERY, VERY well to write a strong letter of recommendation.
4. **Utilize Your Network**: According to a recent study by Linked In, **85% of all jobs are still filled via networking!** Many recent graduates or young professionals find that hard to believe but it is true!! When you first moved to LEX did you drive around looking for a place to get your hair cut or did you ask your roommate or friends where they go? It's the same for networking...most managers or hiring officials will tell you they would much rather receive a call, email (with your resume attached) from a colleague telling them what a great candidate you are then plow through a stack of resumes that they don't know!! Utilize everyone in your network....faculty, clinical instructors, nurse colleagues, physicians, co-workers,

managers, family friends, coaches, me your Nursing Career Coach, etc. You never know who might know someone that is looking for a qualified candidate including your clinical rotations!!! So make sure you let them know that you would love to be considered for future opportunities if they would have an opening. Did you know that the UK Nursing Career Center has compiled a list of more than 42+ RNs and health care professionals that have landed jobs locally and in 16 different states?? Most of these RNs, APRNs and healthcare professionals are UK alumnae!! At one point in their career they were in your shoes so they are happy to help you job search and network!! Just email Sue H. Strup sue.strup@uky.edu and ask for the list of Networking Contacts.

5. **Applying for jobs:** Although networking is still the best “proactive” job search strategy yielding more interviews and job offers, you should still apply for jobs and keep in touch with the Nurse Recruiters!! To professionally apply for a nursing position, visit the web site of the various hospitals, medical centers, clinics, or facilities that you would like to work. When applying for jobs make sure you apply using strong cover letter that speaks to your skills and abilities that “matches” what the employer is looking for and an updated resume!! Don’t rush to make the deadline...you will want to read the job description thoroughly to see what skills and abilities they are looking for and include those in your resume. Be sure to change your Career Objective for every job you apply (e.g., To obtain an oncology nursing position for a NCI Designated Cancer Center.”

If you know the Manager or Director of a department and you are inquiring about career opportunities, be professional when emailing the departments asking about openings or to shadow. If you are sloppy and unprofessional with your job search materials (typos, grammatical errors, misspelled names, etc.) how does that reflect on you and your nursing abilities?? Be sure to run a spell check and have someone read over your resume and cover letter for grammatical errors. Also, make sure to look the names of people to whom you are writing to make sure they are spelled correctly and that you have the correct credentials listed. Attend one of the Resume/Cover Letter/Job Search Group Sessions offered almost every Monday at 11 a.m. in the UK Nursing Career Center – UK Chandler Hospital H-172. Email Sue H. Strup sue.strup@uky.edu to register.

Try to find the “name” of the hiring manager or Nurse Recruiter and not address your cover letter, “To Whom It May Concern.” If a colleague or clinical instructor led you to this job opening, use their name in the first sentence of your cover letter. Same with the resume...if you find an APRN Urology position, update your resume with your urology nursing skills. Target your “dream” healthcare facility and visit their job posting site often (5 – 6 times/week!!). Book mark them so it’s easy to search them. Also, look at other job boards such as Indeed.com (www.indeed.com), or the job boards from various professional organizations (see # 6 below), or ZipRecruiter www.ziprecruiter.com/jobs/, or Glassdoor (www.glassdoor.com), to name a few and some of the Professional Association web pages (see #6 below).

Applying for APRN jobs: If you are an APRN make sure to apply for positions that are within your certification and scope of practice (i.e. don’t apply for a women’s health position if you are an acute care NP)

By attending a Job or Career Fair is also a great way to meet several Patient Care Managers and staff and to discuss openings. Visit the web page of the hospital or medical center you are interested in applying. See if they will have any upcoming Job Fairs. Request the handout, “*Preparing for a Job or Career Fair,*” from Sue H. Strup, Career Consultant, UKHealthcare. Email: sue.strup@uky.edu

6. **Professional Associations:** Showing a commitment to your new profession, you can join the professional association such as the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP), Oncology Nurse Society (ONS), Emergency Nurses Association (ENA), Certified Nurse Midwives (www.midwife.org), Certified

Registered Nurse Anesthetists (www.nursesource.org/anesthetist.html), Clinical Nurse Leaders (www.aacn.nche.edu/cnl), Clinical Nurse Specialists (www.nacns.org), Nurse Educators (www.nursesource.org/nurse_educator.html), Nurse Practitioners (www.nursesource.org/practitioner.html), to name a few. Many of these professional associations have free job boards and post job openings all the time and many allow new graduates to join for a reduced price or may allow you to join for FREE. On the AANP web page, they also list APRN international jobs if someone is interested in traveling abroad.

7. **Job Searching in a Different Specialization:** It is hard enough to land a dream job in an area that you have a lot of expertise, but it's another thing to job search in a specialization that you have no experience such as OB, Primary Health Care, Oncology, Urology or Pediatrics. For a new specialization, you will need to bring back your experience on your resume even if it's from a previous clinical rotation or volunteer experience that you did years ago.
8. **Volunteering –** Don't forget that volunteering is another way to gain valuable skills in an area that you have gone to school (APRN) and is also a great way to get your foot in the door and meet other APPs, RNs, PAs, etc. Many hospitals have their own Volunteer Office and you can start there. If you are interested in volunteering in a clinic, for example, possibly becoming a Dermatology APRN and you currently work on an oncology floor, try volunteering or shadowing for a dermatology clinic where you truly can be immersed in the profession and gain valuable observation skills. The APRN that you are shadowing can also be a great addition to your network. If you are a new graduate of a Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) program, consider volunteering at Mission Lexington (www.missionlexington.org) or Refuge Clinic Lexington or Nicholasville (<http://www.refugeclinic.org/>) where you will be working side by side with MDs, and other APPs. Same with Perioperative Nursing...volunteering at Surgery on Sunday (<http://www.surgeryonsunday.org/>) is a great way to learn scrub, circulating or post-operative recovery skills. Or Pediatric Nursing, volunteering at Baby Health Services (<http://babyhealthlexington.org/>)
9. **Informational Interviews:** Another great way to network is to conduct an informational interview. An informational interview allows you to "interview" someone in your chosen field, or a field that you are considering. The purpose of an informational interview is twofold: a) to find out more about the field, department or employer in which you are considering employment, and b) to make contact with professionals who can offer information and possibly help you along the path of finding the right job for you. The idea is to dress professionally, to ask great questions, and to make a positive impression and a valuable connection while finding out the "inside scoop" about your field. Follow the steps below in order to complete a successful informational interview!
 - a. Make a list of people you know who have a connection to your line of work/ area of interest.
 - b. Call or email each person on your list and suggest a brief meeting (10-15 minutes) in order to learn more about their line of work. Suggest a meeting (informational interview) at their place of employment or wherever is most convenient for them. The meeting might even be before they go to work at a coffee shop. Make sure you pay for their coffee....they are giving you invaluable time, information and resources!! If an in-person meeting is not offered, ask for a skype meeting or phone meeting.
 - c. Be on time for the meeting and ask for information and suggestions, **not a job**. Be brief and respectful of the person's time. If they offer a tour, take it!! Meet as many people as you can and pass out resumes if asked.
 - d. Have good questions prepared. Be sure that you have researched the field, the hospital, medical center, and that person's position adequately before you arrive. This will help you ask better questions and appear more professional. These will help you get started:

- How did you decide to go into this field?
 - How did you get your position here?
 - What type of degree / education do you possess?
 - What do you like best about your job?
 - What are some of the challenges of your job?
 - What opportunities for advancement exist in this field?
 - What do you see as the future of this career path?
- e. Take your resume with you in case they ask to see it or to circulate it for you. If they ask for your resume, offer to also send it electronically so that they might forward via email to prospective employers and colleagues on your behalf.
 - f. Close the meeting at the scheduled time.
 - g. Thank the person for their time. Ask for 2-3 other names of people in the field. Be sure to ask the initial contact if you can use his/her name when you contact the names he/she gave you. Repeat the process above for each new contact.
 - h. Write the initial person a thank-you note **immediately**.
 - i. Be sure to follow-up on all leads and write thank-you notes to everyone who helps you.
 - j. Remember all you need is a nod of recognition to take your resume from the bottom of the pile to the top of the pile. If you don't have contacts now – start making them now!

10. **Interviews:** When you land an interview, make sure your interview skills are polished and you are ready to go with copies of your updated resume, a business suit, leather portfolio or folder to keep your extra resumes and interview questions prepared. To discuss interview strategies including practicing for Behavior Based Interviews, or to attend an Interview Strategies Group Session almost every Wednesday please email sue.strup@uky.edu at the UK Nursing Career Center or call #859.323.3169 or visit the website: <http://www.ukhealthcare.uky.edu/nursing/career-center/>

11. **Evaluating a Job Offer:** You will want to evaluate every aspect of the job offer before accepting. If you are down between two hospitals or two different units, ask each of the Managers if you can come back and **shadow for an entire day**. That will help you understand the “team” of healthcare professionals that you will be working and also get to know the acuity, flow of the day and be able to evaluate each aspect of the job. You will also want to look at the human resource web site and evaluate the benefits including out of pocket expenses for health care insurance, tuition reimbursement, retirement (e.g., UK has a 2 to 1 match), and other expenses including parking, CEUs, certifications, etc. If you would like to evaluate between cities for example, how much your salary in Lexington, KY will go in Nashville, utilize the Cost of Living Index: <http://money.cnn.com/calculator/pf/cost-of-living/>

If you have any questions, concerns or would like to attend one of the Resume/Job Search/Cover Letter Group sessions or Interview Strategies Group Sessions, please email sue.strup@uky.edu at the UK Nursing Career Center or call #859.323.3169 or visit the website: <http://www.ukhealthcare.uky.edu/nursing/career-center/>

Here are some tips/advice/suggestions from some APRNs that landed their first job:

1/10/2019 - A UKHC RN that landed her first APRN job after 6 months of job searching. She applied to 58 total jobs at local hospitals, hundreds more on national job sites and got 6 interviews; she applied to 11 at UK. 17 at Baptist. 10-15 at Lexington Clinic. 5ish at Kentucky One. 10 at First Care UTC. What feels like 100's (and really could be) on job sites like Monster, Nursing Job Café, Indeed, Zip Recruiter, Career Builder, Simply Hired, etc. I've talked with about 6 recruiters or “head hunters” from different companies. It was pretty exhausting and discouraging but now is totally worth it! Here are some brief thoughts about my job search and some words of encouragement...

--Follow everything Sue says! I had an interview and when I followed up, the medical director said, "If you have to interview anywhere else, do the exact same thing. It was perfect." I did not get this job (it's a tough market!), but it was good feedback that my attire, initial introductions, demeanor, notes, questions/answers, etc. was tailored and appropriate for the interview.

--hand written thank you notes are important and leave a great impression

--in multiple interviews the MDs and managers commented on how prepared I was-I had several pages of notes written in a notebook and they mentioned they liked seeing that

--invest in a good suit and shoes that you feel confident in

--tailor your resume to each job

--take your time answering interview questions

--do some CEUs or a conference (if you have extra \$) in the area where you get an interview or where you are applying

--shadow other APPs or volunteer where APPs are volunteering (e.g., Surgery on Sunday, Refuge Clinic, Mission Lexington) while you are job searching to see if you can network and hear about new APRN openings

Stay positive! It is difficult to get that first position, but it will be so worth it. Enjoy this in between time with friends and family as you won't have this extra emotional/mental capacity or flexibility in schedule. It's ok to feel discouraged--but when you do, process it, and then remind yourself of several good qualities about yourself and why you will make an excellent APRN. Also, stay in touch with Sue as she is a huge help and source of encouragement!