

The Essential Guide to Becoming a **Staff Nurse**



IAN PEATE

WILEY Blackwell

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To staff nurses, past, present and future

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About the Author

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Ian began his nursing career in 1981 at Central Middlesex Hospital, becoming an enrolled nurse working in an intensive care unit. He later undertook 3 years of student nurse training at Central Middlesex and Northwick Park Hospitals, becoming a staff nurse and then a charge nurse. He has worked in nurse education since 1989. His key areas of interest are nursing practice and theory, men's health, sexual health and HIV. Ian has published widely; he is Professor of Nursing, Editor in Chief of the *British Journal of Nursing* and Head of School at the School of Health Studies, Gibraltar.

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Preface

Becoming a staff nurse brings with it a lot of mixed emotions, responsibilities and a salary. Three years of blood, sweat, tears and laughter have led to this position, but still your journey is not over as you become truly a lifelong learner.

The transition from student nurse to staff nurse takes place overnight, from being a student nurse and then a registered nurse with a personal identification number from the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and then there is the change from being responsible to being accountable; for some this can be daunting. Some may suggest the transition takes 3 years, from the day you commenced your education. The text aims to facilitate the transitional process.

Contemporary nursing practice is constantly changing and evolving. Historically, nursing has been offered at certificate level and then diploma level and now entry to the professional register can only occur if the registrant has been educated to degree level. Since September 2013 all pre-registration nursing programmes leading to registration have been at a minimum undergraduate degree level. Throughout all the changes the length of the programmes has remained at 3 years.

The title Nurse is a title that is protected in law; no person is allowed to purport to be a nurse unless his or her name appears on the professional register and no person can practice nursing unless his or her name has been entered onto the professional register. Entry to the professional register can only occur when the standards that the NMC have set for education have been met. You have met those standards (exacting standards) and your name is on the professional register. You have made it, be proud and uphold the standards of the profession, congratulations!

There has been a massive reorganisation of health and social service provision and there have been a number of high-profile cases concerning nursing and nurses reported in the media. All of this has had an impact on the role and function of the newly registered nurse – the staff nurse.

The world continues to change and in response to this the provision of nursing services has also needed to change. Nurses are now working in a variety of health and social care sectors that had hitherto been unheard of. This text takes into account the direction for nursing as detailed in policy and practice, identifying the changes necessary to the way nurses work and to their roles, responsibilities,

educational and developmental requirements in order to deliver safe, competent and compassionate patient-centred nursing services. The text is suited to the community setting, primary and acute care with an emphasis upon the adult field of nursing; however, the broad principles can be applied across all fields.

Each chapter begins with an aim and a set of objectives helping the reader pre-plan for what is to come and to understand the rationale for the discrete yet intertwined chapters. Text layout has been given much thought, aiming to ensure that it is user friendly and engaging. There are 10 chapters. Inspiration is provided throughout the text at appropriate intervals offering the reader practical hints and tips, where you are asked to consider specific issues. You will be asked to carry out a variety of exercises along the way, where the author hands over to the staff nurse.

An evidence base is used to support discussion. Reference and referral to organisations such as the Royal College of Nursing, the NMC, UNISON, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network and other appropriate organisations is made. Referral to the revised 2015 Code of Conduct (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2015) and other guidance issued by the regulator has been included.

The text will help support you as you endeavour to offer safe, effective, evidence-based and patient-centred care, with the patient at the heart of all that you do. The information provided will help generate confidence and understanding. The book provides you with material that will help you to consolidate your three-year education programme as you make the transition from student to staff nurse, the autonomous and accountable practitioner.

It is anticipated that it will help you appreciate how your role and function must change now that your name has been entered on the professional register. The text does not aim to provide you with a repertoire of skills that will enable you to perform clinical procedures; it should be seen more as a resource, an aide memoir, as you are about to begin your work as a registered nurse.

The text is designed to be used as a reference text, compact enough to be carried in the pocket, small enough to be put in a bag and referred to throughout the day, at home, on the train or at work. It is not intended to be read from cover to cover in one sitting; it should be used as a guide, a reference. This text provides you with details concerning the theory of leadership and management and teamwork as well as offering helpful hints and tips about the 'doing' aspect of the role; the key principles are provided in one text, avoiding the need to visit several texts.

Reference

Nursing and Midwifery Council (2015) "The Code. Professional Standards of Practice and Behaviour for Nurses and Midwives" <http://www.nmc-uk.org/Documents/NMC-Publications/NMC-Code-A5-FINAL.pdf> last (accessed February 2015).

CHAPTER 1

Getting the job you want

Aim

The aim of this chapter is to help you get the job you want.

Objectives

By the end of this chapter you will be able to:

- 1 Give some consideration to your future career prospects
- 2 Have further understanding of your role as a staff nurse
- 3 Read a job description critically
- 4 Put together your curriculum vitae (CV)
- 5 Understand how to complete an application for a job
- 6 Prepare for interview

Introduction

CONGRATULATIONS STAFF NURSE! Well done, you did it! Three years of hard labour, blood, sweat and for sure plenty of tears, and your name now appears on the professional register. OK, enough of the celebrations; it is time to get that job you really want.

In some areas jobs are hard to find and the competition can be stiff. You have to stand out above the crowd but you will need more than your good looks, wit and humour. The way to get the job that you want is to prepare, prepare and prepare; oh, and did I say prepare?

This opening chapter will consider the role of the staff nurse and some of the issues that can impact on the nurse's role and function. It is essential that you give serious consideration to where you want to be in 5 years' time (a common question used at interviews); so you must have an understanding of the various

career options available to you. This chapter cannot do this for you; you have to do this but, be bold, think wide and far. Your registration is in effect your passport to the rest of the world – the world really is your oyster.

Application by curriculum vitae (CV) is becoming more popular; the chapter provides pointers on CVs. You must not forget however that the completion of a standard application form (electronic or hand written) is still very much used, particularly in the NHS.

There are sections in the chapter that help you read and understand a job description, encouraging you to look at it in a critical light. When you have considered your career trajectory, you have critically analysed the job description, tailored your CV to reflect the person specification and completed the application and have been invited for interview; at this point you really do have to talk the talk and walk the walk. There are hints and tips towards the end of the chapter that will help you prepare for interview.

The role of the staff nurse

Over the years the role of the staff nurse (the registered nurse) has changed and will continue to change and evolve. The changes are often the result of professional, statutory requirements as well as the demands made by the public on nurses and health services. Nurses are members of the multidisciplinary team, often acting as a pivot, the coordinator of care, particularly in the health care setting. The team will have common goals but each with their own different roles to perform. The Royal College of Nursing, RCN (2013) has defined various roles within what it calls the nursing family (see table 1.1).

The multidisciplinary/inter-relational working arrangements of the various members of the nursing team can be found in figure 1.1.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012

This Act has introduced changes for the delivery of health and social care and has been hailed as the biggest changes to the NHS since the system was set up in 1948. A summary of some aspects of the Act is detailed in table 1.2. The Health and Social Care Act (the Act) is divided into 12 parts and is only relevant to England.

When the Act was introduced, primary care trusts and strategic health authorities were abolished as part of the radical restructuring of the health service; new health and well-being boards have been established with the aim of improving integration between the NHS and local authority services. Clinical commissioning groups have taken over commissioning from primary care trusts

Table 1.1 The nursing team – roles.

Registered nurses	Assistant practitioners	Health care assistants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use their specific knowledge to make clinical judgements in order to assess the needs of the people they care for • Prescribe, appropriately delegate and supervise nursing care • Are accountable practitioners as well as being accountable for the care that they have delegated to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the work of a variety of registered professionals, crossing professional boundaries • Makes judgements using a comparative approach • Plan their own work in line with accepted protocols and standard operating procedures • Can undertake the routine supervision of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have nursing tasks delegated to them by the registered nurse and are supervised when providing care to people • Work within and are guided by protocols that have been set • Undertake the performance of tasks that are commensurate with their level of assessed competence • Have responsibility to inform the person delegating tasks if they do not have the competence to undertake it

Source: Adapted from Royal College of Nursing (2003, 2013) and Skills for Health (2010).

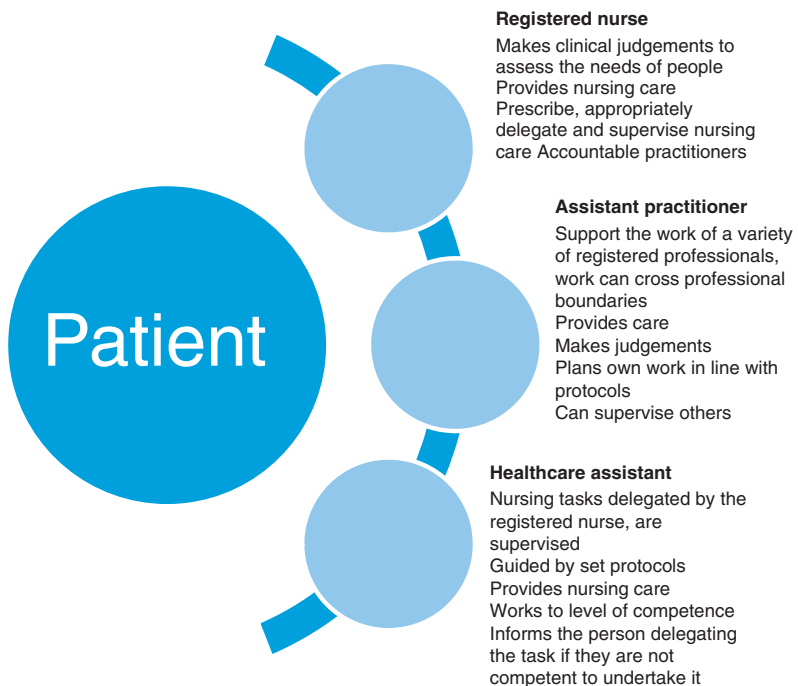


Figure 1.1 The inter-relational aspects of the various members of the nursing team. Source: Adapted from Royal College of Nursing (2013).

Table 1.2 A summary of some aspects of the 2012 Health and Social Care Act.

-
- The health service in England incorporating duties of the Secretary of State for Health and new commissioning measures
 - Further provisions about public health as well as direction on the cooperation of bodies with functions relating to public health
 - Regulation of health and adult social care services (particularly Monitor), competition issues, licensing, pricing, health special administration and financial assistance in special administration cases
 - NHS foundation trusts and NHS trusts
 - Public involvement and local government concerning HealthWatch at national (England) and local levels
 - Primary care services
 - Regulation of health and social care workers
 - The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), including a slight name change from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence
 - Information concerning health and adult social care services
 - Abolition of some public bodies, such as, the Appointments Commission, the National Patient Safety Agency and the Alcohol Education and Research Council
 - Miscellaneous, including information relating to births and deaths, duties to cooperate and supervised community treatment under the Mental Health Act 1983
 - Final provisions, comprising financial provisions and commencement of a consultation with Scottish Ministers
-

and are working with the new NHS Commissioning Board. Monitor, a new regulator has been established to regulate providers of NHS services in the interests of patients and to prevent anticompetitive behaviour. The voices of those who use services have been strengthened with the setting up of a new national body, HealthWatch, and local HealthWatch organisations. Public Health England, a new body, is leading on public health nationally and local authorities do this at a local level.

These changes to the provision have had significant impact on the ways in which nurses work as well as on whom they work with. Having insight and being able to demonstrate this insight can help you at interview as you will be expected to be able to show an understanding of how the NHS is run and how the nurse contributes to its success.

Being up to date and demonstrating this at interview means not only being on top of contemporary practice issues but also having an all-round understanding of the politics of health and social care. You will only be able to confidently state facts with regard to how the provision of care is delivered at micro and macro levels and what has an impact on this if you have done your homework.

Things to consider

Take some time and think about the people who may be interviewing you for this your dream job. They are more than likely highly educated and in positions of seniority; they have seen so many changes over the years in many forms. They have seen changes made to the roles and function of nurses, they are looking for someone who knows what contemporary nursing is all about and they want you to be able to tell them what the drivers are behind role change. Do your homework and dig deep; be ready to discuss the politics behind the role.

The job description

A staff nurse's job is a staff nurse's job anywhere – wrong, and this is why it is essential that you are critical of the job description. At first glance according to Tremayne (2009) all jobs seem to offer the same things – excitement, challenge and flexibility. This is done in order to try and make their job stand out.

During your nursing studies you will have been asked as a senior student in your academic work to 'critically analyse'. The skills that you have developed during your studies will now come into play with regard to the job description.

Critical analysis does not mean being negative; it requires you to be objective with regard to the job description and look for the good and not so good aspects. You have to be focused and try to avoid being subjective; it is so easy to do this when you are so keen to get a job. What you want is the job of your dreams.

A job description is an outline of a job; it can be anywhere from a few sentences to a few pages long. Being able to quickly and correctly analyse the job description can help you search for employment more effectively.

Often job seekers apply for jobs based only on the job title. Job titles are usually 'general', for example, 'staff nurse'; what is most important is to look at the key responsibilities to make sure that your skill set really matches the role. If you do not have some relevant skills, then there is little chance they will call you forward for interview. Spend more time reading the information as opposed to focusing on the job.

You should avoid giving the selector (those that sift the applications) the impression that you are applying for every advert out there regardless of whether you have the relevant skill set or experience for that position. Having read the job description in a critical way you will come across as being a person who knows what the potential employer is looking for as opposed to casting a very wide net. The people doing the hiring want to be sure that the applicant has clearly read the job description (see table 1.3).

Table 1.3 The job description critically analysed.

-
- Take time to evaluate your own job experience and skills before evaluating the job description. It is essential that you know your applicable skills, experience and education level
 - Print out the job description. Using a highlighter pen underline or highlight important qualifications. You can also copy and paste the description into a word processor document and highlight lines if you prefer
 - Identify the job location. This should be listed at the top. Do not apply for the job if you are not available to work in that area. There are some positions that may specify that they will require you to work at various locations (locally or nationally)
 - Identify and highlight the education required for the post. This is often listed as diploma, bachelor's degree, master's degree, certification or another form of qualification that may be related to the speciality. Decide if you qualify based on the education level
 - Highlight the skills necessary for the job. This could be written in a list or in prose format. If it is listed in sentences or paragraph form, list the skills on another piece of paper, underlining each skill that you possess. Look for skills associated with the use of information technology, interpersonal skills, familiarity with technical terms, experience in specific areas, fields (i.e. child, mental health, learning disability or adult), problem-solving skills, physical demands and more
 - Identify and highlight the experience required for the job. Pay attention to language when looking at experience. If 3 years is listed as a requirement, the employer is likely to be strict; however, if 3 years is listed as a 'desired qualification' then it may not be strictly necessary
 - Identify the daily activities that are involved in the job. Highlight hours, specific duties and daily tasks. Make sure you can complete these tasks prior to applying
 - Go through the job description looking for specific requirements. Some positions may require that you are to work on internal rotation. If you cannot fulfil these requirements, then do not apply for the job. They are non-negotiable
 - Highlight the salary and other forms of compensation. Near the end of the job description, there is usually a salary or grade stated. Sometimes, the description will say depends on experience, which means that the salary is negotiable based on how well you fulfil the qualifications
 - Decide if you fulfil the education, experience, skills and various requirements listed in the job posting. If you do decide to move forward in the application process write a covering letter and adjust your CV to address your applicable qualifications. It is essential that you write a covering letter and a CV that addresses each job you apply for specifically. This demonstrates that you have researched the organisation
 - Identify the steps that are necessary to apply for the job. Many job descriptions state clearly where a CV, a covering letter or inquiries can be sent. Highlight the deadline to apply and ensure that you adhere strictly to that deadline
-

Applying for a job can be easy, but applying for the right job is not always easy when you have to match the job profile. If you have questions about the description, find out more by calling the organisation. Only apply if you think you can actually do the job.

