

Employment Guidelines for Nurses

October 2002

1. Introduction

The Nurses Association of New Brunswick (NANB) has a mandate to support registered nurses in achieving high standards of professional practice to ensure safe, competent nursing care for the public. It is important therefore, that the environments in which nurses practise, are conducive to safe, competent and ethical nursing care.

Nurses practise in a number of roles within the domains of practitioner, educator, administrator, researcher and consultant (*Scope of Nursing Practice*, NANB), and may assume more than one of these primary roles within the context of their practice. Changes in the health care system, in the labour market and in society's valuing of health and wellness, have created new roles, functions and contexts for nursing practice.

NANB supports the principle of collective bargaining for nurses, by nurses, as governed by provincial legislation. In situations where nurses, registered to practise in New Brunswick, do not have the benefit of a collective agreement, NANB has developed these guidelines to support nurses who are in, or entering such employment situations. This may include physician private practices, industrial employers, clinical trial research firms etc. NANB believes that the elements contained in current nursing collective agreements serve as a valuable reference for nurses seeking employment in non unionized settings.

These guidelines are based on NANB's belief that good employment practices contribute to good nursing care and job satisfaction for the nurse.

2. Pre-employment

Professional Resume

The professional resume is a critically important document. **Your resume is in essence the first impression you leave with a prospective employer, and as such warrants your careful and thoughtful attention.** There are many resources available through print as well as on-line media, which outline how to construct a resume. Templates can be found on such online sites as <http://search.officeupdate.microsoft.com/TemplateGallery>

The basic essential components of a professional resume include:

- **Personal Data:** name, address, telephone number, email address
- **Summary Lines:** These are snapshots that are designed to immediately capture the interest of a prospective employer and should be tailored to the job you are applying for and the particular skill in your professional toolkit that you feel you bring to that particular job. Examples might include such lines as "Advanced practitioner in critical care", "Experienced nurse manager" etc.

- **Professional Experience:** This is where you quantify your experience as specifically and succinctly as possible; -“member of the trauma team in a metropolitan tertiary care emergency department”; managed a regional breast cancer care program involving a multidisciplinary care team in partnership with community agencies”; “managed a multidisciplinary team of 30 full time staff”; “developed and accountable for an annual operating budget of 2 million dollars” etc.
- **Employment History:** A complete chronological history of your work experience is captured in this section, including details concerning any breaks in employment over your working career and why. References for each position cited in your work history may also be included here.
- **Education and Credentials:** Formal and continuing education credentials should be cited here including all degrees, diplomas and education-in-progress.

Preparing for an interview

Research the prospective employer

It is critical to enter any interview with a prospective employer prepared with a comprehensive understanding of organization/agency or company with whom you are seeking employment. In preparation for an interview, gather as much information as possible about the employer from publicly available information. This could be through the agency’s annual report, information available on line through the organization’s website, copies of strategic or program plans, etc. This will help you speak intelligently during your interview and will also help you frame your own questions for the interview. You may feel free to ask for such materials directly from the organization, in advance of your scheduled interview.

The interview should be an exchange of information

While it is important to understand what the organization/company wants, and what you have to offer, it is also important to discuss what the employer has to offer, and what *you* want. It is essential to express an interest in the organization/company and the work being done. By asking questions you demonstrate investigative skills, illustrate you are particular about which employer you work for, and that you are not going to take just any offer.

Make sure you get each person's business card, preferably at the beginning of the interview, so you can address each person by name. Good questions to ask in the first round centre around the job content, and the organizational culture and future such as what types of projects or opportunities would be forthcoming over the next six months.

The first round of interviews is about discovery

Interviewing for jobs is a process and, while not always the case, there are many situations in today's job market where you can expect to have more than one interview as part of the employing agency's selection process. The cost of hiring and training employees is an expensive one and employers are not only looking for specific job skills but also for people who will be a good "fit" with the organization's value system and culture. This should also be an opportunity for you as a prospective employee to assess the employment situation to see if meets with your expectations.

In situations where you will have more than one interview, there are specific objectives for the initial interview. This is your opportunity to learn about the job and the company/organization, not the benefits or raises. Prepare five or six questions before the interview and take them with you. This will show good preparation on your part. This time is a valuable opportunity for you to get the information you need to help you make an informed decision.

It may be that you are interviewed by one or more individuals, depending on the job you are seeking. It is important to consider to whom you are talking. The **human resources** person is the one likely to know about job descriptions, qualities being sought and the morale or company culture. The **hiring manager**, the person to whom you will report, is the person to ask about the department, the team you will be working with and the challenges associated with the job.

As the interview process unfolds, there will be time to ask about the benefits and practical matters. Often the human resources department will provide you with a brochure or information packet. Obviously, you will need this information to assess an offer.

Know your rights as to what questions can be asked of you

Technically, it is illegal for an interviewer to ask anything personal that is not directly job-related. Off-limit questions include (but are not limited to): information regarding your age, marital status, country of origin, religion, sexual preference and health status. Personal questions considered to be job-related usually are allowed in the interview or on the job application. The interviewer wants to know if you can report to work and do the job. Any information that could be enlightening is important. **But the interviewer's questions should focus on the job and your qualifications to do it.**

By becoming aware of illegal questions, you will be prepared to deal with them if confronted in an interview. Pre-interview thinking and preparation can spare some embarrassing or uncomfortable moments during the interview.

Although illegal, questions about future plans of motherhood may be asked in an interview. It is important to consider ahead of time how to respond in dealing with the concern behind the question, while ignoring the illegal question itself. For example: "*Whether or not I plan to have children in the future is not really relevant to my career. I plan to work and have a career no matter what happens in my personal life.*"

The Videoconference Interview

Technology has once again added a new dimension in the job search process. Videoconferencing is not a substitute for a face-to-face interview, and a personal meeting would always be the first preference; however, the advantages sometimes outweigh the disadvantages and this type of interviewing is gaining in popularity as technology improves. This technology saves time, money and allows several locations to connect at once, in spite of major time differences.

Employers can now see and judge appearance and body language to get a deeper sense of what applicants have to offer, before flying them cross-country for interviews. This includes the capability of viewing applicants at multiple sites, in various locations, at the same time.

If you are being interviewed by videoconference, you need to understand how to prepare yourself to make a good impression through this medium. Some helpful hints are included at the end of this document.

Regardless of the type of interview, the best advice is to prepare and practise beforehand.

3. The Employment Contract/Offer of Employment

Employment contracts are recommended as a protection for both employer and employee. An employment contract is a written, legally binding agreement, signed by both parties to the agreement that specifies the terms between employer and employee. The content of a letter of employment offer or employment contract will vary depending on the job.

An **offer of employment** should always be in writing on the employer's letterhead and signed by someone in a position of authority with management responsibility. It is important for you to be aware of the basic components of employment contracts and/or employment offers and what each entails. The more you know about the elements of an employment offer, the better able you will be to **negotiate the terms of employment and other benefits**. This will help to insure a mutually-beneficial relationship between yourself and your new employer.

Basic Elements of the Employment Contract

An employment contract should at least cover the following topics within the contract/letter itself or through reference to specific company personnel policies or employee handbook that address the employer's position.

- **Employee's Duties:** An outline of the basic roles and responsibilities that are to be met by the employee for the duration of employment in that position
- **Duration of Employment:** The start/end dates of employment, if the position is for a particular term (example 3 years) and whether this is a full time,

temporary, or part time position. The extent of the paid orientation period as well as terms of the probationary period should be defined.

- **Compensation and Benefits:** The overall starting salary and the process for annual salary review and increments; additional bonuses; pension plans; health and disability insurance plans available for employees.
- **Hours of Work/Time Off:** The hours of work expected on a daily/weekly basis should be clearly established and should include provision for regular breaks, exclusive of meal breaks. Company policies regarding overtime payment, paid vacation, paid public holidays, and various leaves covering sickness, bereavement, disability, jury duty, etc. should also be clearly established.
- **Job Performance:** Employee performance expectations, performance appraisal intervals and process, disciplinary guidelines, grievance procedures, employee counseling practices, etc.
- **Employee's Loyalty to Employer's Interests:** Policies regarding conflict of interest, employee conduct, and any resulting legal implications of a breach in such policies.
- **Confidentiality:** This element may not appear as separate and distinct and could be covered within other employer's policies, as it relates to the employee's responsibility to keep company policies, standards and other information confidential. This may also outline policies of confidentiality of patient information where applicable.
- **Termination of Employment:** The obligations of both employee and employer relative to notice of termination of the employment relationship. At minimum these must respect the parameters established within the New Brunswick Employment Standards Act, referred to in Section 4 of this document.

Negotiating Terms of Employment and Benefits

The market law of supply and demand factors significantly into the amount of latitude you may have in negotiating better terms and conditions in your employment contract. The most favourable condition for the prospective employee to negotiate is when supply of registered nurses is low and demand is high.

Negotiating the terms of employment is a process that occurs throughout the pre-employment relationship with a prospective employer. There are a number of monetary and non monetary benefits that can be negotiated and agreed upon, in writing, before accepting an offer of employment. There are also other factors to consider, such as more challenging work, a better company or increased opportunity. The decision, however, should be thought through before rushing ahead.

Based on your discussions with a prospective employer, you should have a reasonably good understanding of what to expect should you receive a written

offer of employment. Generally speaking however, it is advisable to request a day or two to review and consider the terms of the written employment offer. Benefits can be worth another 29 percent to 50 percent of your salary; therefore it is always best to take some time to reflect on the total package.

- Have a clear understanding of those items you want to negotiate and know your bottom line; the point at which you are prepared to walk away from the job offer if these terms are not met.
- Follow up with a phone call to confirm your understanding of the terms of the offer and then identify those areas where the offer may still be lacking.
- You should remain calm and maintain control of the negotiation as you may meet with resistance. Assure the prospective employer that you are seriously considering their offer but these things are important to you.
- Lay out your counter offer (e.g. a signing bonus of \$1000, reimbursement of 50% of moving expenses and paid time off to write an exam in July) and gauge the reception you get.
- Offer to call back the following day and discuss these further.

Of the elements typically contained in the employment contract, the following are examples of terms and conditions that often can be negotiated:

- **Salary/Compensation:** NANB believes that registered nurses should be remunerated commensurate with experience, education and responsibilities, reflective of the value of nursing services. It is important that you know your worth before entering into any discussion about your salary, and be willing to promote yourself at the appropriate salary level. This requires some research to determine the salary range typically paid by employers for someone with your background, experience and credentials. Salary ranges established in current collective agreements are one source of local market information. New Brunswick labour market studies are also available on line at <http://www.gnb.ca/0126/0001e.htm>

Once you have identified a salary range, the final step is to determine where you fit in the range, based upon your perception of your credentials.

- Clarify what recognition will be offered for any **special credentials or education** you may have, including partial completion of a recognized professional degree.
- Terms and conditions concerning **hours of work** (normal hours, overtime, on call or callback), **retirement/pension plans, vacation entitlement, performance expectations** and opportunities for advancement. Once again nursing collective agreements and New Brunswick labour market studies can provide a benchmark against which you can determine optimal levels for each of these items.

- **Support for professional development:** Employers and employees share responsibility for maintenance of employee competence and professional development. Be specific as to what you are looking for from the employer and be prepared to negotiate. This might include support in the way of time off to attend courses, write exams, tuition reimbursement upon successful completion of a course/program that will benefit the employer and/or the clients you serve. Get a commitment on required skills for the job and you should communicate your expectations that required skills such as BCLS/ACLS are 100% covered by the employer. The NANB Position Statement on Continuing Education may serve as a resource when negotiating support for professional development.

Once you have made an informed decision, you should forward a letter formally accepting, or rejecting any final offer of employment.

4. Employment Practices

The needs of nurses employed in any setting are the same as those nurses protected by a collective agreement relative to job security and salary reflecting the worth of the services provided.

In the absence of a collective agreement, labour legislation may be an employee's only guarantee of access to basic employment standards, rights and benefits.

In New Brunswick, the Employment Standards Branch promotes, oversees and enforces the application of the [*Employment Standards Act*](#). It provides supports to employers and employees in New Brunswick to ensure fair and equitable workplace practices. The Act offers minimum employment rules on such things as minimum wage, overtime pay, vacations with pay, and sick leave. Employers and employees may enter into an agreement for greater benefits than provided for in the *Employment Standards Act*. More information is available by contacting the Department of Training and Employment Development, Employment Standards Branch, P.O. Box 6000, Fredericton NB E3B 5H, or by calling 1-888-452-2687, or on line at

<http://www.gnb.ca/0308/0001e.htm>

The *Employment Standards Act* serves all New Brunswick employees and employers who come within provincial jurisdiction. Employees not governed by a collective agreement, who have a complaint concerning their employer/employment practices, can place a complaint under the Employment Standards Act.

Employees and employers who fall within federal jurisdiction are governed by the [*Canada Labour Code*](#).

For those employers and employees party to a collective agreement, additional information on the *Industrial Relations Act* can be obtained on line at www.gnb.ca/0110/0001e.htm .

[Human Resources Development Canada](http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/common/workplace.shtml) provides valuable information on workplace programs, policies and practices through its Workplace Information Directorate available on line at <http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/common/workplace.shtml>

Information concerning the benefits and deductions you should expect relative to the Canada Pension Plan Act can be obtained at <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/C-8/index.html> and the Employment Insurance Act at http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/ei-ae/loi-law/ei_act.shtml

Other pieces of relevant legislation including the [*Occupational Health and Safety Act*](#), [*Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission Act*](#), the [*Workers' Compensation Act*](#) and [*The New Brunswick Human Rights Act*](#) may also have an impact on workplace conditions, workers' rights and employer responsibilities.

Information can be obtained from the Human Rights Commission concerning such topics as employment conditions and practices, job advertisements, workplace accessibility and information on what questions can legally be asked of you on a job application form or in an interview..

Current legislation is never static. Research indicates that the values of the Canadian workforce are changing and conflicts related to an expectation for greater work-life balance have an impact on workplace wellness, productivity, and workplace equity as well as on broader issues like public and occupational health, early childhood development, the well-being of families and communities and the renewal of the voluntary sector. (*Work life Balance in Canada*, Canadian Association of Administrators of Labour Legislation, February 2002).¹ This changing character of the Canadian workforce is influencing a review of current labour standards and employment practices.

5. Professional Practice Environment

“ Nurses have an obligation to their clients to demand practice environments that have the organizational and human support allocations necessary for safe, competent and ethical nursing care. A quality nursing professional practice environment is one in which the needs and goals of the individual nurse are met at the same time as the patient or client is assisted to reach his or her individual health goals, within the costs and quality framework mandated by the organization where the care is provided.

Developing and supporting quality professional practice environments is a responsibility shared by practitioners, employers, governments, regulatory bodies, professional associations, educational institutions, unions and the public”. (Quality Professional Practice Environments for Registered Nurses, CNA, 2001)

¹ <http://labour-travail.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/worklife/wlbc-ctvpc/presentation.cfm>

In the interest of public safety and optimal client outcomes, registered nurses have a professional responsibility to uphold the code of conduct and standards of practice established for the profession. Regardless of the employment setting, nurses are professionally responsible and accountable for promoting a practice environment that supports their ability to practise in accordance with these standards. Nurses are obligated to respond to and report professional practice problems that would compromise the ability to do so. The *NANB Standards for Nursing Practice* and the *CNA Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* are two fundamental standards documents that are the benchmarks for professional practice for all registered nurses. In situations where the ability to meet these standards, or where client safety and/or optimal client outcomes appear to be compromised nurses have a professional responsibility to respond to and attempt to correct the situation. The *NANB Framework for Resolution of Professional Practice Problems* is a resource that provides advice on fulfilling this professional responsibility.

For additional information please contact:

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Fax: (506) 459-2838 Web site: www.nanb.nb.ca

References and Further Reading

Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses, CNA, 1997 www.cna-nurses.ca

Commitment and Care: The benefits of a healthy workplace for nurses, their patients and the system. A Policy Synthesis. Baumann, A., et al www.cprn.org

Continuing Education, NANB Position Statement, May 1996

Creating High Quality Work Environments: Trends, Issues and Challenges Graham S. Lowe Canadian Policy Research Networks & University of Alberta, July 2001

“*Employee or Self-Employed ?*” (Canada Customs and Revenue Agency)
<http://www.ccra-adrc.gc.ca/E/pub/tg/rc4110ed/rc4110ed.html>

Employment Standards Website (Government of New Brunswick)
<http://www.gnb.ca/0308/0001e.htm>

To view the entire *Employment Standards Act*, visit:
<http://www.gnb.ca/acts/acts/e-07-2.htm>

To view the Employment Standards *Fact Sheet* (as a quick reference), visit:
<http://www.gnb.ca/0308/001e.htm>

Ethical Guidelines for Nurses Involved in Research, CNA, 2001 www.cna-nurses.ca

Framework for the Resolution of Professional Practice Problems, NANB, 2002
www.nanb.nb.ca

Quality Professional Practice Environments For Registered Nurses, CNA, 2001
www.cna-nurses.ca

Standards for Nursing Practice, NANB, 1999 www.nanb.nb.ca

TIPS FOR VIDEOCONFERENCE INTERVIEWS

Videoconferencing is not a substitute for a face-to-face interview, and a personal meeting would always be the first preference. The advantages however, sometimes outweigh the disadvantages. This technology saves time, money and allows several locations to connect at once, in spite of major time differences.

You may find the following tips helpful in preparing for your interview using videoconferencing technology.

- Speak up if you're experiencing any difficulty with sound, delays or picture. This is not a time to suffer in silence. It will not be held against you if the technology is not working in your favor.
- Dress conservatively in solid colors. Keep distractions like jewelry to a minimum. Choose soft, neutral shades rather than black and white, which are too extreme on camera. Various shades of blue work well. Watch TV presenters and newscasters for other ideas about camera-ready clothes.
- Look at the camera full-face, as though you were presenting the news. Talk to the camera as you would any person interviewing you -- be conversational, maintain eye contact and smile.
- Keep your movements limited. Hand gestures will be magnified on the screen. While arms waving about can be distracting, you don't want to look stiff either. Use small, smooth movements when gesturing.
- At the same time, forget about the camera and the technology. Focus on your purpose and presentation. You want the attention and concentration to be on you and what you are saying.

There are some disadvantages to interviewing via videoconference, such as the lag time you will experience, as the data is compressed and sent from one location to another. This means there is a longer than expected period of silence while you sit and wait for a response from the other end. The trick, which will become obvious, is not to step on the other person's words. Allow for the delay.

The future of interviewing is here. Be prepared.