

Nurse in Practice Program Screening and Interviewing Job Applicants

Selecting job applicants for an interview

Efficient screening of applicants depends on specifying clear job requirements and all the associated duties. Separate the necessary skills from the helpful skills, the soft (interpersonal) skills from hard (job-related) skills. The screening process will save you time and energy because you will select nurses suitable for primary care.

Refer to the practice needs identified during your team's preparatory discussions. Use [Nurse Compass](#), an interactive online tool, to explore and select nursing care activities aligned with scopes of practice and tailored to patients care needs.

Your objective for the interview process is to compare the information presented against your selection criteria.

Identifying candidates

Define criteria for assessing interviewed nurses to make precise, objective, and accurate decisions and hire the right person for a practice team. Examples of competencies may include:

- Nursing skills and knowledge at various stages of a patient's life.
- Ability to learn and flexibility.
- Decision making.
- Consistency and logic.
- Communication style.
- Computer literacy and experience with health technology.
- Teamwork.

Screening cover letters

A cover letter serves as the first indication of whether the applicant is a suitable candidate and applicants should provide a cover letter that describes their relevant background linking their education and experience to the primary care nursing position and highlighting relevant qualifications.

Explore during the interview how a cover letter links the candidate's qualifications to the position.

Screening resumes

A simple way to begin the screening of resumes is with a "three piles" approach that classifies applicants as qualified, possibly qualified, or not qualified.

Compare the resume against your selection criteria and use it to prepare for the interview:

- Is the level of education completed and credentials appropriate?
- Examine professional experience. Are there any gaps, missing information, or patterns in a candidate's work experiences (e.g., promotions, career changes, employment stability, reasons for leaving positions)?
- Explore non-traditional experiences and acquired the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform according to practice needs.
- Look for portable and transferable skills that will help in team-based care functions.
- Identify technical skills which are important to confirm during the interview.

- Are there spelling or grammatical errors in the resume? Is the resume formatted and presented appropriately?

Selecting the "right" individual who aligns with the practice type and team culture is crucial for ensuring a seamless orientation process and long-term retention.

Preparing for an interview

Before you start to design your interview questions, clearly articulate to yourself what problem or need is to be addressed using the information to be gathered by the interviews. This helps you keep a clear focus on the intent of each question. There are two rules of thumb for deciding how many people to interview:

1. Try to interview from three to six candidates.
2. Only interview people you think you would want to hire.

Get ready to make the interview go smoothly by doing the following:

- Designate enough time for the interview to avoid rushing and unnecessary pressure.
- Try to have more than one interviewer (you risk intimidating the candidate, but you'll make a better decision). Arrange to have the same interviewers conduct all the interviews.
- Have questions ready and share them with other interviewers.
- Review the resume and know the job description, bring both to the interview.
- Send the job description and/or statement of qualifications to candidates before they come to the interview meeting.
- Arrange the meeting time and space - make it comfortable and private to help candidates feel at ease and more empowered.
- Provide candidates with a comfortable, safe place to wait for the interview.

Tips for interview questions

- Ask all candidates the same questions to be able to compare candidates with each other.
- Only ask questions about past job performance, skills, and personal traits which are directly related to the position: nursing services, patient relations, team collaboration, etc.
- Get the facts, and then ask subjective questions which will allow you judge the person's ability to fit the practice and team culture.
- Word questions clearly and as neutral as possible. Avoid wording that might influence answers, e.g., evocative, judgmental wording.
- Ask open-ended questions. For example, ask how the candidate's experience would help the person do this job better, rather than ask what experience the person has. It enables respondents to choose their terms when answering and present their individuality.
- Do not ask leading questions, which tell the applicant what answer you want to hear.
- Be careful asking "why" questions that might cause respondents to feel they must justify their response and suggest a cause-effect relationship that may not truly exist.
- Do not use stress questions that are designed to find out if an applicant can handle a stressful job. Use situational questions (e.g. provide an example when...) or by checking with references.

Tips for interviewing job applicants

- Keep notes of what each candidate answers so you can compare them with other candidates' responses.
- Focus on learning about the person's experience, ability, and personal qualities that will directly affect how he or she will do the critical parts of the job.
- Do not talk too much during the interview.
- Ensure each applicant is given the opportunity to ask questions.
- Describe the next steps and when you are planning to complete the hiring process. Do not decide too early. Listen carefully to what the candidate has to say throughout the whole interview.

Selecting a successful candidate

Choose a nurse who best aligns with the primary care practice goals, meets the specific needs of the patient population, and fits well with the team culture. Ensure your selection offers significant long-term benefits for both the practice and the quality of patient care. Rank more than one candidate to be ready for any last-minute unforeseen situations.

Checking references

After selecting the best candidate, conduct background checks and verify their education and licenses. Decide whether to contact references by phone or email. Consider reaching out to former team members in addition to direct supervisors. Typical reference check questions include:

- How long have you worked with the applicant? What was your relationship?
- How would you describe the applicant's key strengths/accomplishments? Can you give specific examples?
- How would you describe the applicant's working style?
- Can you describe the applicant's interactions with team member/patients?
- How well does the applicant work independently?
- Comment on the applicant's response to stress encountered in the workplace.
- All things considered; would you recommend the applicant?

Criminal record check

It is advised to conduct a criminal background check when conducting reference checks before extending an employment offer letter. To request a criminal background check, visit the RCMP criminal records checks webpage [here \(https://justice.gov.bc.ca/criminalrecordcheck\)](https://justice.gov.bc.ca/criminalrecordcheck).

Following up with unsuccessful candidates

Once the job offer has been accepted by the selected candidate, follow up with and inform the unsuccessful applicants; this can be done via email or phone.

Applicants who did not meet the application requirements and were not interviewed can be informed via email. For applicants who did meet the hiring requirements and participated in an interview but were unsuccessful, it is advised to follow up by phone. This is a 'good practice' as an employer and helps maintain relations should you need to hire a nurse again.

NOTE: Communicating to an unsuccessful applicant should not be actioned until the successful applicant has signed and returned their employment offer letter.