

# APN Employment Interviewing

Nursing: Answers to 11 common APN questions about the job interview

Congratulations! You have the interview! This handy document outlines some general information about the APN interview process that previous students have shared. Here are the 11 questions most frequently asked about the job interview:

## 1. How long are interviews?

Interviews can last anywhere from 30 minutes to 2 hours, depending on the number of people you are scheduled to meet.

## 2. Who will interview me/How many people will interview me?

Whomever your direct supervisor is, and fellow staff, including other APNs, or physicians, depending on if it is a hospital, clinic or private practice. Interviews usually have 1-3 interviewers, but larger hospitals can have as many as 10 people on a panel asking questions.

## 3. How can I find out the interview format at the place I am going to interview?

When you are offered an interview, thank the HR person for the interview and ask them if they can tell you about the participants, format, and length of the interview, so you can prepare.

## 4. What do I wear?

Business casual: Slacks or skirt, button down shirt or blouse, blazer, hair back, if jewelry minimal, neutral colors and comfortable shoes. A tie is a nice touch if you're so inclined.

## 5. Do I take a copy of my resume?

Take 3-5 copies, just in case you are meeting someone who has not seen your application.

## 6. Will I be offered a position at the interview?

This does occasionally happen. If you feel ready to take the position, say yes! But if you want more time, or have more interviews, thank them so much for their offer, tell them you are very excited, and would like to think about it. Ask them then for a time frame in which they want you to respond to them. For example: When do you hope to make your decision by? May I have two weeks to give you my final answer?

## 7. What are some interview questions APNs have been asked in the past?

Interview questions seem to cover 3 areas, and we will share sample questions from each.

### A. AGENDA SETTING, 'OPENER' QUESTIONS

(e.g. Why are you interested in this position?)

### B. 'SKILLS KEY TO THE POSITION' QUESTIONS

(e.g. Clinical skills, interpersonal/communication skills, (potential) conflict, nursing philosophy or approach).

### C. FEARS/CURIOSITY QUESTIONS

(e.g. What will be your learning curve in this position, where do you see yourself in 5 years? How do you deal with stress?)



Let's look at some questions:

### **A. AGENDA SETTING QUESTIONS:**

These are broad 'opener' questions, and the best strategy is to respond with a summary of your academic training, professional skills/experience, and interest.

- a. Can you walk me through your resume/CV?
- b. Tell me about yourself
- c. Why are you interested in this position?

Note: Since you are responding to an 'opener' question, your answer/summary should take no more than 2 minutes to answer, to let the interviewer ask more detailed follow up questions. So practice responding in that period of time.

### **B. SKILLS KEY TO THE POSITION QUESTIONS:**

After the Agenda Setting Questions, interviewers will focus on questions that help them understand if you have the required skills to do the job. These areas of questions include:

#### **Clinical Skills:**

- a. Can you talk about your range of clinical experience?
- b. Imagine a patient with a history of prostate cancer complained of blood in his urine. How would you approach this situation? (Note: this is a question to understand how you'd approach, and assess a patient, even if you weren't familiar with the clinical issue. Discuss what you are thinking, first steps. What questions you would ask, and how you might present that to a more experienced clinician.)

#### **Research Skills:**

- a. Tell me about your current research. How did you design your project and what were your outcomes?
- b. Can you talk about your experience involving the collection and analysis of quantitative/ qualitative data, developing data collection instruments and plans, conducting case studies, designing and implementing the analysis and synthesis of data?
- c. What statistical methods and data collection instruments are you familiar with?

#### **Interpersonal/Communication/Leadership Skills:**

- a. What criteria do you use to tell if you are understood by your listener?
- b. What approach would you take in explaining a complex clinical issue with a patient who does not have a clinical background?
- c. Health care is a service-oriented industry. Tell me about a time you personally created a good customer service experience for someone.
- d. What are the qualities that you think make a strong manager?
- e. How do you describe your leadership abilities?
- f. What are some strategies you employ to successfully work with diverse populations?
- g. What type of qualities in people do you enjoy working with the most? The least? How do you manage people who exhibit qualities from your 'least' list?

#### **How You Deal With Stress/Difficult Decisions:**

- a. Tell me about a time you failed/faced a significant professional setback. How did you handle it?

#### **(Potential) Conflict:**

- a. A patient is frustrated because she had been kept waiting for her appointment. How would you handle it?
- b. A patient insists on a particular treatment plan that you do not agree with – how would you address that situation? For example: You have an elderly patient whose daughter is at the bedside around the clock and writes down everything the nurses and doctors do. You have a new order of Digoxin for the patient. When you come into administer it, the daughter refuses the medicine stating that it is not for her mother.



- c. A new patient is clearly experiencing anxiety, and is becoming loud and belligerent. What steps would you take to alleviate his concerns?
- d. Tell me about a time you had a disagreement with a colleague or supervisor. How did you handle it?
- e. Imagine that a physician/attending/etc. is suggesting an approach with a patient you have been monitoring, and you disagree with this approach. How would you address it?
- f. Tell me how you dealt with a situation in which an individual who you delegated a task to did not perform up to expectations.
- g. What would you do if the LVN you were working with got exasperated and yelled at you, stating that a certain patient was too difficult and they were handing them off to you?
- h. What would you do if you realized another clinician made a medical error?

### **Nursing Philosophy/Approach:**

- a. In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of Evidence Based Nursing Practice?
- b. What do you think are key skills needed to be an excellent APN? How have you developed those skills?
- c. Describe your nursing philosophy.
- d. Define professionalism.

### **Project Management Skills:**

- a. This position will require the successful candidate to develop research designs for small-and large-scale research projects. Can you tell me about a time you had to manage a project, from design and implementation to evaluation? How did you approach it, and what were challenges you had to overcome?
- b. What example can you give me about a time you had to work independently?
- c. The successful candidate will be tasked with preparing technical memoranda and reports, preparing research reports intended for a wider audience, and communicating research results to clients and other external parties. What is your experience in these areas?
- d. Can you specifically discuss a time you have had to share highly technical material in a clear manner to a non-technical audience?
- e. I see you had significant presentation experience. Tell me what criteria you use to gauge whether or not you are giving an excellent presentation.
- f. We often collaborate on policy/research papers, which often have strict deadlines. Describe a successfully collaboration on a written document. Did you face challenges and how did you address them?
- g. Tell me about a time you initiated and implemented a new procedure, program or system, that you are proud of. (It can be employment or volunteer related)

### **C. FEARS/CURIOSITY QUESTIONS:**

After determining that you could technically do the job, interviewers often try to tease out why you are interested in the position, and any barriers there might be to you doing the job successfully.

### **Your Learning Curve:**

(This is your self assessment of your ability and growth areas.)

- a. What will be your learning curve?
- b. Now that you have heard about the position, what do you think will be most difficult for you if you are the selected candidate for this position?
- c. How would you describe your weaknesses in terms of your clinical skills, and what do you need from us to address/develop those skills?
- d. Tell me about a clinical mistake you made, and what you learned from the experience.

### **What Motivates You as an Employee:**

(This information help an employer determine how to manage and keep you as a long-term employee):

- a. How would you describe your work ethic and approach towards nursing?
- b. What do you think is most enjoyable/rewarding about being in the field of nursing?
- c. Describe qualities that you think are key to a thriving work environment?
- d. What type of work environments do you thrive in/what was your best work situation and why?
- e. Where do you see yourself in five years?



- f. What are you most proud of to date about your nursing career?
- g. What clinical/research/writing/management/etc. skills do you wish to develop?
- h. Why are you specifically interested in working with our organization?

### **8. What questions are illegal for employers to ask?**

Any questions in regards to race, color, age, sex, sexual orientation, religion or national origin are illegal, according to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Candidates are also protected against age discrimination under the Employment Act. Lastly, discrimination against individuals with disabilities is prohibited by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

### **9. What are questions to ask interviewers?**

There are a number of questions you ask employers to determine if you will have the experience you seek in terms of clinical population and issues, support and training. If it's the end of an interview, you will only be able to ask about 3-4 questions. But feel free to pepper these questions throughout the interview, if appropriate. Note that your last question should always be: What is your next step in the hiring process? This way you will know their hiring time frame and when you can expect a call.

- a. What qualities/skills do you think the selected candidate will have to possess to succeed in this job?
- b. What would a typical week be like for the selected candidate?
- c. What do you think will be most challenging for the selected candidate in the first 6 months?
- d. Who would be the selected candidate's primary supervisor?
- e. I would like to be certain I am meeting your expectations. How will the selected candidate's performance be evaluated? Is there a formalized feedback process?
- f. How have you oriented new staff onto the team at your organization? How long does the orientation period last? (Also ask fellow staff how they were trained.)
- g. What are the expectations for the selected candidate in terms of hours?
- h. How would you describe the level of autonomy you expect from APNs on this floor/in this practice?
- i. How does this position interact with your position?
- j. How would you describe the patient population?
- k. What is the size of the unit? How many patients does your facility have the capacity to serve?
- l. What is the current staffing and patient/staff ratios?
- m. What are some changes and challenges you have seen here in the past year (in terms of an increase of certain clinical issues, staffing changes, patient demographic changes, etc.)
- n. What are some changes and challenges you forecast occurring here in the next year?
- o. Why did you choose to work in this organization – what is most rewarding?
- p. How would you describe the culture, management style and organization here?
- q. (To ask a direct supervisor) How would you describe your management style?
- r. (To ask colleagues) How would you describe (the position's direct supervisor) management style?

### **10. When do I discuss salary/the compensation package?**

Whenever the employer raises it, or during the period of time that exists after you are offered the position, but before you accept (in short, when you are negotiating the job offer). The interview is the information gathering stage. Before you can suggest a salary range you need to clearly understand what they expect of the person in the role. If you are asked for a range, you can state that:

*"Honestly, I'm still formulating a range, based on our conversation about the responsibilities of this position. Also, I am still researching the average salary for NPs/CNS/ Nurse PhDs in this position in the Bay Area. I am confident that we can reach a mutually-agreed upon number if I am the selected candidate. That said, can you share your sense of what salary range was determined to fill the position?"*

### **11. Where do I find sample thank you notes that I can email/handwrite within 48 hours of interviewing?** On the OCPD nursing samples page on the website! [www.ucsf.edu/career](http://www.ucsf.edu/career).