

Practice Information

Negotiating the Employment Relationship

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Nurses should negotiate employment relationships that consider their unique talents, professional goals, and personal lives.

Nurses today are taking extra steps to find jobs that are right for them, carefully considering where they want to work, who they want to work with, and, increasingly, setting the terms of their employment relationship through negotiated employment contracts. Of course, there is no “one size fits all” method to settling the terms of an employment relationship, and what is important to one nurse may not be important to another. However, there are a few general factors that apply to any bargaining situation, and nurses may wish to consider these factors as they make employment decisions.



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Do Your Homework

Before negotiating any aspect of a job offer or employment contract, do your research. What is the average pay for a nurse in your community, and how does it compare to other communities? What is the reputation of the employer? Does the employer provide training programs comparable to that of similarly sized employers? These are just a few of the questions a nurse should consider when contemplating a job offer. Knowing this information will better enable the nurse to effectively evaluate the job offer and determine how to successfully negotiate a counter-offer if necessary.

Know Your Needs and Goals

Once you know about the hospital or practice, take time to reflect on your needs and objectives. Does the job match your interests and skills? Will it help you reach your career ambitions and lead to job security? Will the job accommodate the type of lifestyle you have chosen for your family? Does it offer room for professional growth? Because the personal and professional needs and goals of each nurse are different, a contract should be evaluated based on the specific requirements of the individual nurse.

For instance, a nurse recently received two job offers. While each offer was identical in terms of the practice environment, one offered a significantly larger compensation package but also required a longer daily commute. This nurse had already determined that spending time with her young children was an important need in her life, and consequently, she evaluated both offers based on this priority. She determined that despite the compensation incentives, the offer that required the longer commute would not allow her to fulfill her desire to balance her work and home lives. Subsequently, while she turned down the offer with the larger compensation package, she negotiated a compensation increase for the offer with a shorter commute—an end result that may not have been as clear to her had she not taken time to identify her own needs and goals.

Remain Flexible

Before entering into negotiations, determine what you are willing to accept and what you can live without but also remember that flexibility is key. You may find yourself in a situation where you're not offered something you thought was important to you, but at the same time, you may be offered something you hadn't considered before. For example, if you ask for increased pay, but the organization is unable to increase your pay, would you be willing to take more vacation days instead? If you've done your homework, you'll be able to evaluate the new opportunity fully, and you may find it carries more value than what you originally determined was a “must-have.”

Don't Be Star Struck

With the excitement of a new job offer, you may feel inclined to accept immediately and sign on the dotted line. Don't. Identify a reasonable timeframe in which to make your decision and let the employer know when you will get back to them. Give yourself time to evaluate the position and employment scenario, reflect on your goals and requirements, and determine whether you want to counter-offer. ♦

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