

Give yourself a competitive edge

Mark Stagen

Imagine this scenario. An agency recruiter contacts you about an assignment in a location that you've been longing to visit. Perhaps Alaska for three months in the summer, South Florida in



February, or a teaching hospital in Chicago, where several friends from college happen to live. You're thinking, "Great! I'm there!" But you're busy with work and life, and

a few days pass before you check your e-mail and find a request for paperwork from the agency. The recruiter needs your reference list and proof that you're current on your immunizations, among other things. The files that contain those documents are in your apartment—which, because you're on another assignment, is three states away. A week later, you get back to the agency, prepared to deliver everything that's needed, only to be told that your dream job was awarded to someone else.

In the world of travel healthcare, time is of the essence. Sometimes it's even the determining factor in who lands the best gigs. Here's what to expect and how to be ready to spring into action and secure the best assignments when they come your way.

Submit documentation

As a traveling healthcare worker, it's important to know that every reputable agency you work with will have stringent standards for evaluating and verifying your education, training, skill set, practice history, and more. Having the information they need at your fingertips is critical. Ideally, you should have all of the documents that agencies routinely request scanned and converted to PDFs for easy transmission via e-mail.

You'll be asked to fill out an application and clinical skills checklist. Store your résumé and other information you need to complete these documents on a laptop or flash drive that you carry with you while traveling. Professional references are also required, so maintain a current list of several people who can attest to your skills, experience, character, and work ethic. The agency may only need two references, but offering four or five will make the recruiter's job easier if he or she can't immediately reach one or more of the people on your list.

your personal and professional history before sending you on assignment. This includes a criminal background investigation as well as checking for Medicare/Medicaid sanctions and prior involvement in medical malpractice suits. Honesty is the best policy in this regard. It's wise to reveal anything that may surface during a background check at the outset. Clean up details like paying old parking tickets; you don't want an annoyance like that to keep you from landing an assignment.

Undergo a physical examination every year and have documentation on file to show that you've done so. You'll also need proof of immunity to measles, mumps, rubella, and varicella. Evidence that you have antibodies to hepatitis B will also be required, and a tuberculosis test is required annually. You may be asked to submit to a drug screen by the agency with which you're working and/or by the hospital or clinic to which you are assigned.

Maintain high standards

If all of this sounds a bit daunting, know that there is a good reason for each and every aspect of the screening and verification process described here. The agency you work with has an obligation to send only the most highly qualified healthcare professions to its client hospitals and clinics. Protecting patients is a top priority, followed closely by protecting the reputation of traveling healthcare professionals and the industry as a whole.

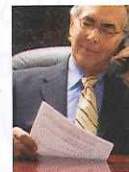
For more information, visit natho.org and click on "Credentialing Standards," or ask your NATHO agency recruiter for more ideas on how to respond to requests for information in a timely manner and land the assignments you most want. **HT**

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TOOLS

Are you prepared for a phone interview? At healthcaretraveler.com/interview, find out how to ace the interview when it's not face-to-face.



EDUCATION

Traveling healthcare professionals should be thinking about taxes year-round, not just during tax season. Learn about five ongoing tax issues specific to your career at healthcaretraveler.com/ongoing.

The agency will verify your education, license to practice, and other credentials. Be sure to keep your state licenses, CPR certification, and other credentials with expiration dates current and ready to e-mail on a moment's notice. Ditto for being able to show that you've been through the annual training required for hospital workers that keeps you up-to-date on Joint Commission and OSHA standards, infection control, patient rights, cultural diversity, ethics, HIPAA, and patient safety. Many hospitals now use competency screening exams, so be prepared to respond promptly to a request to take one of these tests.

Provide your history

Agencies will also thoroughly look into