

# Positioning yourself to land the best assignments

Mark Stagen

**T**he market for traveling healthcare professionals is rebounding nicely, with more jobs cropping up in good locations. You can position yourself to get the assignments you most want, in the places you'd most like to visit, by taking a few common-sense steps that will help distinguish you from the thousands of other travelers vying for the plum jobs.

**Be prepared.** Keep your résumé up to date and all of your certificates and credentialing documents in one place—ideally in an electronic format so that you can easily supply them when requested. Stay current on CPR, health screens, continuing education, and other licensing requirements. Keep your reference list updated, and make sure that it includes only managers who know you well and with whom you have worked directly. If you know for sure that you want to spend time in, for example, California, apply for a state license there so you'll be ready when an attractive opportunity becomes available.

**Be flexible.** If you are open to a range of options in terms of location, size of facility, and shifts you're willing to work, you'll find yourself with a steady stream of good assignments. The ability to float also makes you an attractive candidate. For example, if your first choice is working in the critical care unit but you have years of experience in med/surg, volunteering to move between departments could be the critical factor in landing a choice assignment.

**Be responsive.** When a recruiter contacts you by phone or e-mail about an opportunity, respond as quickly as

possible. Recruiters are often on tight deadlines to confirm candidates for the hospitals they work with. If they don't hear back from you, that great job in your dream location may go to the next person on the list. When you're asked to do a telephone interview with a hospital, make yourself readily available and be prepared to "sell yourself" in a professional manner once you're on the phone.

**Be serious.** Many hospitals now require that traveling healthcare professionals take online competency tests as part of their evaluation process. Don't make the mistake of thinking that these tests are a "slam dunk." They may be more difficult than you think. Take the testing seriously, and be prepared to be intellectually challenged.

**Be reliable.** When you take an assignment, unless you have reason to believe that your license or patient safety is at risk, finish it. One of the worst things a traveling healthcare professional can do is leave a job early. It puts the hospital (not to mention the patients) in a bind, it makes the agency that sent you there look bad, and it can hurt your reputation.

**Be realistic.** Yes, you are in demand. Hospitals need your skills and experience. But don't expect to earn double or triple the average hourly rate for your specialty simply because you're willing to travel. Be aware, also, that pay varies by geographic location. And if you're offered a rate that sounds too good to be true, it just might be.

**Be honest.** If you're working with multiple agencies, be upfront and let recruiters who contact you know about other jobs you are considering. Also, if you have anything in your personal or professional past that may turn up on a background check—licensing issues, prior disciplinary actions, legal matters, etc.—disclose that upfront. Gaps in employment are no problem, as long as you can explain them.

**Be loyal.** It's fine to work with more than one agency, but if traveling for any length of time is in your plan, you'll likely be better off registering with no more than two or three firms at a time. By doing so, you'll establish a track record and develop relationships with your recruiters. Once they know you're reliable and that hospitals are repeatedly pleased with your performance, they'll probably offer you assignments that

will be to your liking. Loyalty begets loyalty.

**Be savvy.** To protect your own reputation and that of the travel healthcare profession in general, work with reputable agencies. If a firm is a member of the National Association of Travel Healthcare Organizations (NATHO), you should be in good hands.

Follow these simple guidelines, and you'll set yourself apart from the crowd and land plenty of great assignments as the demand for traveling healthcare professionals continues to rebound. **HT**

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For advice on determining the quality, reputation, and ethics of a staffing agency, go to [healthcaretraveler.com/determining](http://healthcaretraveler.com/determining).



### TOOLS

Go to [healthcaretraveler.com/interview](http://healthcaretraveler.com/interview) for tips on preparing for a phone interview. David Morrison, RN, offers pointers on how to ace this crucial step to landing a great assignment.