THE RN NETWORK

New Year. Refresh Your Nursing Career.

The 2027 Nurse Career Guide

Know your worth, get past the resume robots, own the interview, and negotiate the offer you actually want.

Built by Christina D. Archer, Founder, The RN Network
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BEFORE YOU DIG IN

A quick note from me

Every January, nurses tell themselves this is the year. The year they ask for the raise, finally leave the unit that is draining them, or go after the specialty they have been eyeing since school. Then February shows up with a short-staffed weekend and the plan goes back in the drawer.

Not this year. This guide is the drawer, emptied out and organized. It covers the four things that decide how far and how fast your career moves. What you should be paid, how your resume gets read, how the interview really gets decided, and how to ask for more without breaking into a cold sweat.

I am not a nurse. I work on the other side of the table, where the hiring decisions get made, and I have watched great nurses get passed over for reasons that had nothing to do with their clinical skills. Most of those reasons are fixable in an afternoon. So grab a coffee, grab a pen, and let us fix them.

Christina

What is inside

1. **Part 1 · Know Your Worth.** What nurses are paid in 2027 and how to find your own number.
2. **Part 2 · The ATS-Proof Resume.** The rules that keep you readable, plus two templates.
3. **Part 3 · Interview Scripts.** The questions you will be asked and the ones you should ask.
4. **Part 4 · Negotiation.** Five steps and the exact words to use.
5. **Part 5 · Your 30-Day Career Refresh.** A week-by-week plan to start the year strong.

PART 1 · KNOW YOUR WORTH

The national picture

Here is what the most recent federal wage data says about nursing pay. These are medians, which means half of nurses earn more and half earn less. Treat them as a starting point for your own research, not as your number.

Role	Median annual pay (May 2025)
Registered Nurse	$97,550 ($46.90 per hour)
Nurse Practitioner	$132,300
Certified Nurse Midwife	$134,040
Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist	$236,590

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, May 2025 wage data.

A few more numbers worth knowing. There were 3,465,400 registered nurse jobs in the U.S. in 2025, and RN employment is projected to grow 6 percent from 2025 to 2035, faster than the average for all occupations. Advanced practice roles are growing much faster, with employment of nurse anesthetists, midwives and practitioners projected to grow 36 percent over the same period. Fifty-nine percent of RNs work in hospitals, which means more than four in ten work somewhere else. If the bedside is not your forever, you have options.

Why your state matters more than almost anything

The national median hides enormous swings. The same experienced med-surg nurse can earn wildly different pay depending on the state, the metro area, the setting and the shift. That is why the single most valuable thing you can do before any job conversation is look up your own state, not the country.

> **Look up your number for free.** The RN Network Nurse Salary Database covers all 50 states, from staff RN through CNO. rnnet.org/salary-database.html

What actually makes up your pay

Base rate is only one line on the offer. When you compare jobs, compare the whole package.

- **Base hourly rate.** The number everyone looks at first.
- **Shift differentials.** Extra pay for nights, evenings and weekends. These vary a lot by employer, so always ask for the exact amounts.
- **Premium and incentive pay.** Pay for extra shifts, call, charge duties or certification.

- **Sign-on and retention bonuses.** Read the fine print. Most come with a commitment period and a payback clause if you leave early.
- **Tuition and certification support.** Worth real money if you plan to go back to school.
- **Retirement match, health premiums and PTO.** Two offers with the same hourly rate can be thousands of dollars apart once you add these up.

Find your exact number

1. Look up your state and role in the Salary Database.
2. Run your role, state and specialty through the Salary Calculator at rnnet.org/nurse-salary-calculator.php.
3. Check what local employers are posting on the Job Board at rnnet.org/job-board.html. Posted ranges are real-time market data.
4. Write down three numbers. Your floor (the lowest you will accept), your target, and your stretch.

PART 2 · THE ATS-PROOF RESUME

Get past the robots, then impress the humans

Most hospitals run applications through an applicant tracking system before a recruiter ever sees them. The system reads your resume, pulls out the details and ranks you against the job. If it cannot read you, a person never will. Here is how to stay readable.

The 10 rules that keep you readable

1. Use a simple, single-column layout. No text boxes, tables or columns.
2. Use standard section headings like Experience, Education, Licenses and Certifications.
3. Put your license type and state near the top, for example RN, Ohio, compact.
4. Use a standard font such as Arial or Calibri at 10 to 12 points.
5. Spell out abbreviations once, like Basic Life Support (BLS).
6. List each job with employer, city and state, title, and month and year dates.
7. Mirror the exact wording of the job posting where it truthfully applies to you.
8. Skip headers and footers for important details. Many systems cannot read them.
9. Save as a Word document or PDF, whichever the application asks for.
10. Keep it to one page for new grads and two pages for most experienced nurses.

How to write a bullet that lands

Every bullet should show what you did, how often or how much, and what changed because of it.

> **Instead of:** Responsible for patient care on a med-surg floor.
>
> **Write:** Managed care for 5 to 6 patients per shift on a 32-bed med-surg unit, including post-op and telemetry patients.

The figures in these examples are illustrations. Use your own real numbers.

Keyword strategy

Print the job posting and highlight every skill, certification, unit type and system it names. Every highlighted item you genuinely have belongs somewhere on your resume, in the same words the posting uses. If the posting says Epic, write Epic, not "electronic health records."

PART 2 · TEMPLATES

Two templates to start from

Copy the structure, then replace every bracket with your own details.

Template A · Experienced RN

> **[FIRST LAST], RN, BSN**
> [City, State] · [Phone] · [Email] · [LinkedIn URL]
> **PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY**
> Registered nurse with [X] years of [specialty] experience in [setting]. Skilled in [skill], [skill] and [skill]. Known for [one strength a manager would value].
> **LICENSES AND CERTIFICATIONS**
> RN, [State], [compact or single-state] · BLS · ACLS · [Specialty certification]
> **EXPERIENCE**
> **[Title], [Unit] | [Employer], [City, State] | [MM/YYYY] to present**
> Managed care for [number] patients per shift on a [number]-bed [unit type] unit.
> Served as charge nurse [number] shifts per month, coordinating [number] staff.
> Precepted [number] new graduate nurses through orientation.
> **EDUCATION**
> [Degree], [School], [City, State], [Year]

Template B · New Grad RN

[FIRST LAST], RN
[City, State] · [Phone] · [Email]
PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY
Newly licensed registered nurse with [number] clinical hours, including a [number]-hour capstone on a [unit type] unit. Eager to grow in [specialty] within a supportive residency program.
LICENSES AND CERTIFICATIONS
RN, [State] · BLS · [Any other]
CLINICAL EXPERIENCE
Capstone, [Unit] | [Facility], [City, State] | [MM/YYYY] to [MM/YYYY]
Cared for [number] patients per shift under preceptor supervision.
Additional rotations: [Unit], [Unit], [Unit]
EDUCATION
[Degree], [School], [City, State], [Year]
RELATED EXPERIENCE
[CNA, tech, or other healthcare role], [Employer], [Dates]

PART 3 · INTERVIEW SCRIPTS

Walk in knowing how the decision gets made

Before you walk in, do your homework

- Read the facility profile and recent news. The RN Network Facility Directory is a good place to start at rnnet.org/facility-directory.
- Know the unit. Ask the recruiter about bed count, ratios, patient population and who you would report to.
- Prepare three stories you can tell in under two minutes each. A tough patient, a mistake you caught, and a time you helped your team.

Answer with the STAR method

Situation, Task, Action, Result. Set the scene in one sentence, say what you needed to do, spend most of your time on what you did, and finish with what changed. Hiring managers are listening for the action and the result, so do not spend two minutes on the setup.

The questions you will be asked

Tell me about yourself.

Give the two-minute version. Who you are as a nurse today, the experience that got you here, and why this role is your next step. Skip your life story.

Tell me about a conflict with a coworker.

Pick a real example with a professional resolution. Show that you addressed it directly, kept patients first, and that the working relationship was better afterward.

Describe a difficult patient or family.

Show empathy and boundaries in the same answer. What did you hear underneath the frustration, and what did you do about it?

Tell me about a mistake you made.

Choose a real one that was caught and corrected. Own it plainly, explain what you did right away, and what you changed so it would not happen again.

How do you prioritize when everything is urgent?

Walk through your actual thinking. Assess, stabilize the most acute patient first, delegate appropriately, and communicate with your charge nurse.

Why do you want to work here?

Be specific. Name something about this unit or this organization that matches what you want next. "You are close to my house" is true, and it is also not the answer.

Now you ask

The questions you ask tell the manager how seriously you take the job. Have at least three ready.

- What does orientation look like on this unit, and how long is it?
- What are the typical nurse-to-patient ratios on days and nights?
- How long have most of the nurses on this unit been here?
- What does a great first year look like in this role?
- How is scheduling handled, and how far ahead are schedules posted?

Listen for the red flags

- Nobody can tell you the ratios, or the answer changes depending on who you ask.
- The manager talks about "flexibility" a lot but cannot describe a normal shift.
- High turnover is brushed off, or nobody you meet has been there longer than a year.
- You are pushed to accept on the spot.

PART 4 · NEGOTIATION

Five steps to the offer you actually want

Most nurses never negotiate. A professional counter is a normal part of the process. You are not being difficult by asking. You are being a professional.

Step 1 · Know your number

Use Part 1 to set your floor, target and stretch before the offer arrives. If you do not know your number, the employer will happily pick one for you.

Step 2 · Do not accept on the spot

> **Say this:** "Thank you, I am excited about this offer. I would like to look over the full details. Can I get back to you by Thursday?"

Step 3 · Counter with a reason

> **Say this:** "Based on my [X] years in [specialty] and my [certification], and what I am seeing for this role in [state], I was looking for something closer to $[target]. Is there flexibility on the base rate?"

Step 4 · Negotiate the whole package

If the base rate is fixed on a pay scale, ask about the things that are not. Step placement for your experience, sign-on bonus, shift preference, certification pay, tuition support, PTO or your start date.

> **Say this:** "I understand the base rate is set by the scale. Could you place me at a higher step based on my experience, or is there room on the sign-on bonus?"

Step 5 · Get it in writing

Nothing is real until it is in the offer letter. Before you resign anywhere, confirm the rate, the step, the shift, any bonus and its payback terms, and your start date in writing.

Want the full playbook?

Scrubs to Signed is The RN Network job search masterclass. It walks through every stage from resume to signed offer, with templates and a workbook, and you can start tonight at rnnet.org/scrubs-to-signed.

PART 5 · YOUR 30-DAY CAREER REFRESH

Start the year strong

Thirty days. Four weeks. Small steps that add up to a career that is moving on purpose instead of by accident.

Week 1 · Get your house in order

- Check your license and certification expiration dates and put renewals on your calendar.
- Pull your CE requirements for your state. The RN Network CE Marketplace lists them at rnnet.org/ceu/.
- Build your free Talent Agent profile so employers can find you while your contact details stay private.

Week 2 · Fix the resume

- Rebuild your resume with the rules and templates in Part 2.
- Rewrite your top five bullets with real numbers.
- Update your LinkedIn headline to match your target role.

Week 3 · Know your market

- Look up your state in the Salary Database and write down your floor, target and stretch.
- Research three employers you would actually want to work for.
- Practice your three STAR stories out loud. Yes, out loud.

Week 4 · Make your move

- Apply to the roles that match your plan, not every opening you see.
- Reach out to one person at each target employer.
- Decide what you will ask for, and practice the scripts in Part 4.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

Your free RN Network resources

- **Talent Agent and your free profile.** Let the right role find you. rnnet.org/talent-agent.php
- **Nurse Salary Database.** Pay data for all 50 states. rnnet.org/salary-database.html
- **Nursing Job Board.** rnnet.org/job-board.html
- **Facility Directory.** Research employers before you apply. rnnet.org/facility-directory
- **Nurse Income Hub.** Thirty-three ways nurses earn outside the bedside. rnnet.org/income-hub.html
- **Nursing Matters Podcast.** Career strategy for working nurses. rnnet.org/podcast.html

When you want to go further

- **Scrubs to Signed.** The complete job search masterclass, self-paced with lifetime access. rnnet.org/scrubs-to-signed
- **The Inner Circle.** An on-demand career library covering resumes, interviews, negotiation, specialty selection and leadership, with new modules every month. rnnet.org/inner-circle.php

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Here is to your best year yet. Go get it.

Christina D. Archer, Founder, The RN Network

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Sources

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, "Registered Nurses," May 2025 wage data and 2025 to 2035 projections. bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/registered-nurses.htm

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, "Nurse Anesthetists, Nurse Midwives, and Nurse Practitioners," May 2025 wage data and 2025 to 2035 projections. bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/nurse-anesthetists-nurse-midwives-and-nurse-practitioners.htm