

Remember that the quality of your experience – and indications that you got something out of it! – are the most critical aspects of your hands-on healthcare experience.

How Much?

ABSN and BSN applicants must have a *minimum* of 100 hours of hands-on healthcare experience in one setting, in a 3-month period within 12 months of applying to either program.

While this is the required minimum, many applicants have over 1,000 hours of hands-on healthcare experience.

Why?

We want our applicants to be informed about the career path and education they are embarking upon. Healthcare experience is the best way to find out whether nursing is a good fit with your interests and goals.

In your application you will need to draw from your healthcare experience to demonstrate to the Admissions Committee that **nursing is a good fit for you.**

The School of Nursing prides itself on admitting highly motivated, intelligent, and successful candidates. We want you to succeed in our program!

What Does a Quality Healthcare Experience Look Like?

- 1) **Hands-On:** This includes direct patient contact in the context of the health care they are receiving. The direct care you can provide as a layperson is limited. However, there are activities that you are allowed to do and ways that you can **support** and **observe** the work of registered nurses. Consider completing a Nursing Assistant Certificate (CNA) program if you want to gain basic healthcare skills before pursuing your hands-on healthcare experience.

Many ABSN and BSN applicants are trained as CNAs. **However, simply getting the certification does NOT suffice for the required healthcare experience.** Post-certification hands-on experience is important. Also note that CNAs typically work with a mostly elderly population and may have limited exposure to registered nurses (RNs). If you already have certification as a CNA, you might consider supplementing your experience with other volunteer or paid healthcare experience and/or seeing if you could shadow an RN where you work as a CNA.

- 2) **Contact with Registered Nurses and the Work of Registered Nurses:** You want to communicate in your

application that you have a good basic understanding of what it means to be a registered nurse. We want you to know what to expect and to NOT be surprised when you are put into your first clinical at the start of the ABSN or BSN program.

Ideally, a registered nurse who supervised you during your healthcare experience should write your letter of recommendation.

- 3) **Contact with Other Healthcare Providers:** This allows you to observe other professionals and further inform your decision about the nursing profession. This type of experience will let you see teamwork within a healthcare setting. With this type of experience, you might even decide nursing is not the best fit for your skills and interests – and that's okay! It's better to find this out *before* you apply to any nursing program.

Other Suggestions

The ABSN and BSN Admissions Committee will look in multiple places, including your personal statement, your recommendation form and your experience & training for evidence of your:

- Exposure to nursing
- Passion for becoming a nurse
- Being well-informed about what the nursing profession involves
- Awareness and ability to negotiate the challenges of the profession

Think about keeping a hands-on healthcare journal.

Record things that surprise you, things you learn, what you get out of an experience, what you learn about the nurse's role, and what you learn about yourself. Note moments when you are outside your comfort zone – how do you handle the situation and what do you learn? Write down experiences where you encounter a conflict – how do you deal with the situation? What are your experiences working with patients from cultures or socio-economic backgrounds different from your own?

Don't limit yourself to one experience. If you have successfully fulfilled the healthcare experience requirement in one setting, think about volunteering with RNs in another setting.

Where Do I Go for Healthcare Experience?

Many applicants find volunteer and paid positions at hospitals. Check with a hospital's volunteer department for available opportunities. **Be proactive!** As a volunteer, you may be asked to start out in a very limited hands-on capacity (e.g., a volunteer escort) before you can volunteer in a more relevant capacity elsewhere in the hospital.

The following is a list of positions previously admitted applicants have held in hospitals and other settings.

Hospitals

- Children's Hospital: Interacting with patients and families; comforting patients during minor procedures
- Critical Care Unit/Telemetry: Assisting RNs with patient care
- Nursing Assistant Certified: Med/Surg floor
- Emergency Department: Liaising between staff and patients and between patients and their families; assisting staff as needed; restocking supplies; visiting with patients and families to provide comfort
- Pediatric ICU: Volunteering and shadowing nurses
- Hospital Assistant, Transplant Unit: Patient care; vitals record intake and output; answering call lights. Prior to this experience: stocking supplies, sorting mail, putting together kits and the dialysis cart
- Medical Assistant, Emergency Department: Preparing exam rooms; wound dressing and irrigation; blood draws; assisting RNs and MDs with procedures
- Medical Assistant, Pediatric ICU: Assisting medical/nursing staff in direct patient care
- Hospital Patient Care Technician, Pulmonary Medicine and Thoracic Surgery: Helping patients with Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)
- ICU: Assessing patients with RNs, including physical exams; reviewing medications and cardiac rhythms; observing RNs
- Intensive Burn Care Unit: Patient Care; transporting patients; restocking supplies; cleaning; filing; training new volunteers
- Naval Corpsman, Military Hospital, ICU and Emergency: Medical care; health promotion; laboratory; pharm and radiology services
- Post-Operative/Surgery Recovery: Comfort care; walking patients; making beds; setting up medical equipment; patient discharge

Other Settings

- Camp for Campers with Terminal or Chronic Medical Conditions: 24 hour care; medications; monitoring diets; overseeing meals
- Cancer Institute/Education Center: Providing cancer information for families
- Clinic: Shadowing a nurse practitioner
- Doula Care: Providing for free to low-income women
- Guatemala: Assistant to a Mayan midwife
- Peru, Volunteer Intern: Weighing and measuring babies, children, and adults; taking vital signs and patient histories; working with the Red Cross to provide annual exams for women in a local prison
- Same Day Medical Unit/Urgent Care Clinic Volunteer
- School Nurse's Office: Volunteering weekly assisting a school nurse

Things to Keep in Mind

- There are *many* options for getting a quality healthcare experience.
- Most admitted applicants are not limited to a single experience and clearly articulate the relevance of their healthcare experience on their applications.
- An experience may not be inherently good or bad. It may depend entirely on your engagement in it and how you write about it!