



Networking for Nurses

Many nurses are natural networkers. They like to hang out with other nurses to offer help, share experiences and information, and maybe even gossip. But ask them to do the same thing with professionals they don't have contact with on a day-to-day basis and networking suddenly seems foreign and unpleasant. In truth, networking should be as natural as hanging out with your fellow nurses or with your friends. It is a method that professionals use to expand their knowledge and contacts.

Networking is one of those tools that can boost your learning and help you advance and there's really no substitute. The simple act of conversing with other professionals from other departments or organizations can put you in touch with information and connect you to opportunities that you can't get any other way.

Networking for Information

What's the best way to find out what it's like to work in a different area? Talk to someone who actually works there. Say you are in an ambulatory OB department and you want to know what it's like in the inpatient Mother/Baby Unit. By talking to someone who works there you can find out about:

- The 'culture' of the department
- The best and worst things are about working there
- The strengths of the department and where improvements are needed
- The personality mix of the employees
- What management is like
- Whether there are advancement opportunities
- The skills and education you need to be successful

This is just a sample of the kind of information you can pick up by networking.

In addition, any role or new job you want to take on is likely to require knowledge and skills that you will have to develop. For example, if you are in Urgent Care and want to move into the ER, you'll need to figure out which advanced skills you'll need to be successful. You may also need to learn about processes used in the ER or protocols for particular critical situations. These are things you can discover by networking with professionals in the ER who are in a position to advise you and who can recommend courses or certifications to pursue.

Networking for Opportunities

Depending on the source you look at, between 70% and 80% of all jobs are found through networking. This is because networking is an excellent way to discover things like where:

- Skills are needed or challenges need to be addressed
- Positions may be opening up
- Someone is leaving who needs to be replaced and more.

True, within KP you still have to go through the application process and be vetted by HR, but there's nothing like networking to give you early warning about upcoming positions, help you figure out what skills and experience to target in your resume, and to assist you in connecting with the hiring manager so that if your application gets through HR, you'll have a greater likelihood of getting the interview.



How to Network

Networking is a lot like trying to make friends. You have to go to places that the kinds of professionals you want to talk to hang out, and once there, and get into conversations with them. Examples of the habitats in which professionals are found include:

- Professional organization meetings
- Conferences
- UBT meetings
- Union meetings
- Skill fairs
- Interest group meetings
- The cafeteria at the hospital

Once you get to a professional meeting or gathering, networking is about asking questions. If you are genuinely interested in the person you are talking to, you will want to ask questions that help you know him or her. By being yourself while asking questions, you'll probably find that the conversation will naturally move to areas of shared interest. After introducing yourself, some good questions to ask are:

- What department do you work in?
- What do you like about it?
- What do you think the best and worst things are about being in that department?
- What's a day like there?
- Tell me about your colleagues/manager.
- What's your biggest challenge there?
- What skills are needed to be successful?
- Are there any skills you wish you had that would make you more effective in that department?
- How did you get your position there?
- Who else do you think it would be good for me to talk to?

It is critical to be a good listener while you're networking. Why?

- You want to absorb what the person is telling you and learn from it.
- Equally important, you may have information or experience that can be of benefit to the person you're networking with and you don't want to miss the opportunity to share it.

By now I hope you get the fact that networking is just something that professionals do. It isn't an imposition or a "salesy" activity. It is about learning what you don't know from people who are in a better position to know it. You can call your BHMT Career Development Coach to learn more about networking or to practice.