

How to be a Health Care Assistant (HCA): Ten Tips for Nursing Agency Jobs

[Nursing Services of the UK](#) (NSUK) is recruiting healthcare assistants (HCAs) for temporary UK agency work. So what experience is required to be an HCA – and how much of a help are NVQ qualifications in gaining employment?

There is still demand in many parts of the UK for HCAs in a range of healthcare settings - including hospitals, care homes and for domiciliary home care. The advantage of agency work is that HCAs can often earn extra pay, working when and where they want, to meet family and other commitments. Rates of pay at the NSUK nursing agency range up to £21.60 per hour for senior care support workers with an NVQ3. Registration is through the web site at [Nursing Services of the UK](#)

The role of the healthcare assistant is varied and can include working alongside nurses as a nursing auxiliary, or without direct supervision, in a care home or domestic setting.

The types of duties can include: washing and dressing patients; feeding; helping people to mobilise; toileting; bed making; generally assisting with patients overall comfort; monitoring patients conditions by taking temperatures, pulse, respiration's and weight. Nursing healthcare assistants usually work a 37.5-hour week on a shift or rota system, often including nights and weekends.

NSUK offers these top tips on working as an HCA:-

- 1) **Work experience required:** if you are unqualified, to register with a reputable nursing agency requires at least six months' UK care experience, with two good clinical job references that show that you are able to perform as a care assistant to the required level. Many candidates apply in the first instance to work in a nursing home or hospital setting under supervision. This offers immediate employment and also the opportunity to get the training and experience required by agencies.
- 2) **Gain an NVQ:** Hospitals, care homes and other clients of the NSUK agency now often require candidates to have NVQ qualifications, often at Level 2 or above. Further Education colleges run NVQ training in social care. If you contact your local FE college it will be able to advise on the best route to obtain the relevant qualification. After completing a course (lasting several months), you can supply tutors' job references to support your job application to the agency.
- 3) **Enrol for extra training:** in addition to the NVQ, you can improve your skills - and the range and pay of the work for which you can apply – with short courses such as in phlebotomy (venipuncture and cannulation), to qualify for drawing blood samples.
- 4) **Consider agency work:** once you have gained the relevant experience, then at [Nursing Services of the UK](#) you can earn extra pay and work flexibly, usually at hours that suit you. The agency employs staff within different staff 'bands' – such as care support, senior care and NVQ3 qualified staff bands. Pay relates to the band and also the time of the day or week when you work – night work has higher [pay rates](#) than daytime, and weekend shifts attract good rates too.
- 5) **Register with several agencies, just once:** by registering with NSUK, you will be eligible to work with a number of other agencies in the same group, if you choose, to increase your work opportunities. However, it's important to note that you must meet and maintain the required compliance standards, and that a good level of spoken and written English is essential, to help ensure safety standards are maintained at all times.
- 6) **At registration, supply all the information required:** NSUK provides a detailed list of documents you will need to present for registration. To help you through the process, the agency meets with all candidates locally and will review and copy the documents needed. Initial registration should always be started on-line through the [NSUK](#) web site. Documents required include: a completed CRB; a detailed NSUK application form; and job references.
- 7) **Keep your registrations current:** once you have registered with the nursing agency, ensure that your annual certifications are up to date – whether for training, CRB or other requirements
- 8) **Let the agency know when you are free to work:** NSUK's on-line web diary enables HCAs to confirm when they are available. It's worth updating the diary at least once a week. Be flexible: if NSUK knows that you will accept work at short notice - or will work some evenings, weekends or Bank Holidays - you will get more, higher-paying shifts
- 9) **Stay in touch:** find out which NSUK consultants deal with the area where you want to work. E-mail details of the names of the towns and hospitals. NSUK's consultants are there to help, and when they get to know you and the type of work you want, it will increase work opportunities. It's worth registering for NSUK's [Facebook](#) and Twitter pages so that you are up to date on agency news and job opportunities.
- 10) **Consider your career:** are you looking for specific types of work or experience? If you are, do discuss this with your NSUK consultant, as the agency may be able to help, if you meet the standards required by clients for relevant shifts. Again, consider short training courses such as in phlebotomy.

Group House, 92 - 96 Lind Road, Sutton, SM1 4PL Web www.nsofuk.com Telephone: 0845 452 3380 Email: info@nsofuk.com - www.facebook.com/nsofuk and <http://twitter.com/a24nsuk>