

5 Interview Questions for Nursing Assistants

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Nursing assistant is a title that, depending upon certification and training, covers a diverse group of direct healthcare workers who play a vital role by supporting nursing staff in hospitals, long-term care facilities, public institutions and private homes. More than 2.5 million are employed nationwide, and another 700,000 positions will need to be filled in the next 25 years.

Much of a nursing assistant's work involves dealing with a patient's most intimate and basic human needs. It requires excellent observational skills and a high tolerance for cleaning up after people who can't take care of themselves.

In interviews, managers look for compassionate care givers who have no qualms about physically moving the fragile and incapacitated, changing their bedpans and diapers, bathing and grooming them and checking their vital signs.

Maria Gurule, a hematology/oncology clinic and day hospital medical assistant at Los Angeles Children's Hospital, has over 20 years' experience in a variety of settings. "During an interview, you'll get asked about your training, but also about your people skills, patience and physical strength," she says. "It's also important to show that you're willing to learn new things and are teachable."

Here are some questions you can expect during an interview:

Why do you want to be a nursing assistant?

This seems like a simple question, but in long-term care facilities nursing assistants may be responsible for 80 to 90 percent of a resident's daily care. In other settings, the amount of care may be lower, though still intensive. Interviewer need to determine that you have a sincere desire to be employed in the field and have a clear idea of its challenges.

What would you do if a patient falls?

Patients do fall and heavy lifting may be involved. Gurule notes, "When a patient falls, we're often the first to respond. An assistant has to have the skill to lift someone safely, as well as be able to assess a situation and know when to call for help. We file reports on falls too."

What would you do with a patient who is agitated and refuses care?

Sometimes patients resist help, are uncooperative or are unwilling to follow directions. A nursing assistant needs to be persuasive, firm and calm, as well as know when to call for assistance. A job candidate should be ready to answer this question with examples of how he or she has handled, or would handle, a difficult situation.

What would you do if you were asked by a superior to do a job related activity that made you uncomfortable, or that you didn't believe in?

Interviewers need to know that a candidate is able to follow orders from doctors and nurses, as well as respond under pressure. "Following directions is a requirement of the job," says Gurule. "I work with kids who are very sick. If there's an emergency situation, I need to be able to respond to orders quickly and do everything that I'm asked to do."

Describe a situation where you had to show compassion for another person.

Compassion, dignity and respect for others are hallmarks for any caregiver. Because she interviewed at a children's hospital, Gurule's interviewer specifically asked about her childcare experience. "He wanted to know how I was with children. I have children of my own and had been babysitting since I was young.

I love being around kids and care about their well-being — that experience and how I talked about it counted.”

Other questions you might be asked:

List five top qualities required to be a nursing assistant. Which one is your weakest and what will you do to improve?

How would you prioritize a patient’s needs?

You’ve completed your tasks but still have 15 minutes on your shift. What do you do with the remaining time?

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