

Path to Becoming a Flight Nurse

A Guide for High School Graduates

Introduction

Are you fascinated by the idea of providing critical medical care while soaring through the skies? Becoming a flight nurse is a rewarding career that combines aviation and healthcare. This guide will outline the steps you need to take to achieve this exciting profession, including educational requirements, methods to finance your education, and ways to gain valuable experience.

Education

High School

Start by focusing on science courses such as biology, chemistry, and physics, which will provide a strong foundation for your nursing education. Participating in extracurricular activities like health clubs or volunteer programs at hospitals can also be beneficial.

Take advantage of Advanced Placement (AP) courses and College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests to earn college credits while still in high school. Many high schools offer these courses, and passing the exams can save you both time and money in your college education.

Additionally, some high schools have partnerships with local community colleges that allow students to take college courses for free. These programs provide a great opportunity to earn college credits early and reduce future tuition costs.

College

1. Obtain a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing (BSN): While Life Flight Network does not require a bachelor's degree, many hospitals do. Enroll in a nursing program accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) or the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN).

- Consider community college for initial courses to save costs before transferring to a four-year institution.

- Online programs can offer flexibility and affordability.

Advanced Training

2. Become a Registered Nurse (RN): After completing your BSN, pass the NCLEX-RN exam to become a licensed RN.
3. Gain experience: Accumulate at least 5 years of experience in emergency or critical care nursing.
4. Obtain certifications: Pursue certifications such as Certified Flight Registered Nurse (CFRN) and other relevant credentials like Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) and Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS).

EMS & The Nursing Path

Another option is to become a paramedic first. Depending on the state, obtaining a paramedic license can take 18-24 months. After which, you will be able to work and then apply to a [paramedic-to-nurse bridge program](#). These are abbreviated programs that give credit for paramedic education and experience. The benefit of this route is being able to work while completing your nursing education.

Paying for Education

Scholarships and Grants

- Research scholarships specifically for nursing students, such as the Nurses Foundation Scholarship Program.
- Apply for federal and state grants like the Pell Grant, which provides financial aid based on your family's income.

Financial Aid

- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to determine your eligibility for federal loans and grants.
- Take advantage of state programs in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana that provide free community college tuition for eligible students. These programs can significantly reduce the cost of your education and provide a pathway to further nursing studies.

- Explore work-study programs that allow you to earn money while attending school.

Creative Options

- Consider getting your CAN first and working through nursing school.
- Becoming an EMT is a fantastic way to pay for nursing school and gain valuable experience in EMS, which will make you more competitive when applying for flight nurse jobs.
- Consider part-time jobs or internships with healthcare providers that offer tuition reimbursement.
- Look into military service programs such as the Army Nurse Corps, which can provide financial assistance and valuable experience.
- Some hospitals may offer tuition assistance or scholarships in exchange for a commitment to work there after graduation.

Gaining Experience

High Value Work Experience

- Flight programs require that you have 3-5 years experience of ER/ICU experience. But not all experience is the same and it is best to have varied experience.
- Starting out in the ER is a great choice. Trauma centers provide opportunities to understand how top-tier systems work. But smaller, more remote ERs teach you how to work with limited resources. Both are valuable.
- ICU experience is important because many flight programs combine a nurse with a paramedic, who likely won't have the in-depth knowledge of critical care medicine that comes from working in an ICU.
- Working in a Level I or Level II hospital ICU provides really good experience. If possible, work in varying ICUs (Pediatric, Medical, Cardiac, Trauma/Neuro, etc.)

Emergency Medical Services

The option to work as an EMT or medic first gives you valuable experience and can put you in a great position to work as an ER nurse. Additionally, there are ground critical care transport agencies that hire nurses.

Internships and Externships

- Seek internships or externships in hospitals, especially in emergency departments and intensive care units.
- Some flight nurse programs may offer externships that provide a glimpse into the profession.

AAMS (Association of Air Medical Services) has a [Critical Care Transport Academy](#) for people interested in becoming a flight nurse or paramedic.

There are various online courses and textbooks to prepare you to take the Certified Flight Registered Nurse (CFRN) test.

Additional Certifications and Training

- Pursue certifications in trauma nursing, emergency nursing, and flight nursing.
- Attend workshops, conferences, and seminars to stay updated with the latest in nursing and emergency care.

Conclusion

Becoming a flight nurse is a journey that requires dedication, education, and hands-on experience. By following the steps outlined in this guide, you can confidently pursue your dream career, equipped with the knowledge and resources necessary to succeed.

Remember, there are numerous paths and creative options to help you achieve your goals, regardless of your financial or educational background. Your journey starts now—take the first step towards the skies!