

## QUESTION

# How can a new nurse graduate secure a nursing position in pediatric oncology?

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I decided to become a nurse after spending much of my adolescence as an inpatient myself. I had to miss out on many important milestones during my adolescence. However, from my time as a patient, I was able to have the most developmentally normal experiences, thanks to care from my nurses. From my time as a patient during my adolescence, my eyes were opened to the tremendous impact that nurses have on their patients. When I was 18 years old, I enrolled at Saint Louis University (SLU) in St. Louis, Missouri. Because of my passion for caring for the human spirit, earning my nursing degree became my goal, even though I was afraid that nursing may not provide enough authentic human connection.

My heart was set on becoming a nurse before I focused on a specialty concentration in my nursing program. After my first clinical rotation at a skilled nursing facility, I concluded that perhaps I had miscalculated what being a nurse would be like. Fortunately, my faculty mentor discussed with me several career pathways different than skilled nursing—pathways to other populations and in different settings.

After completing the required clinical rotations in my nursing program at SLU, I decided to concentrate on pediatrics as a specialty patient population. For my final elective undergraduate clinical rotation, I was assigned to the hematology-oncology unit at SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital in downtown St. Louis. It was in that unit that I found my home. My clinical experience on the unit gave me a tremendous career advantage because I was familiar with the specialty. That experience allowed me to apply for a nursing position on the unit.

For any new nurse graduate interested in a career in oncology, I highly recommend gaining clinical oncology care experience,

securing a clinical oncology nurse internship, or shadowing an oncology nurse in clinical practice. Before applying for any nursing positions, I also suggest participating in professional networking opportunities. In addition, seek a mentor who can help you as you start your career. Your mentor can help to identify your areas of strength.

In my case, my faculty mentor at SLU previously worked in pediatric oncology. She provided career and personal guidance. Also, when I was a junior in my nursing program, I was invited to join Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing. For me, the Sigma community has been an excellent environment to network and to find job opportunities once out of school.

My clinical instructor in the hematology-oncology unit helped me land a job interview on the unit. As a job applicant on the unit, it helped that I had obtained a recommendation from someone already familiar with the unit. Then, when I applied for a position on the unit, my future unit manager had an interest in my application. When applying for a nursing position, you can also ask for help from colleagues who work in the hospital or hospital system.

Although I was never a patient with cancer, my time as an inpatient taught me firsthand about the tremendous impact that nurses have on their patients. As a patient, I never anticipated just how significant the patient-nurse relationship would be from the perspective of a nurse. Oncology nursing is a unique specialty, very different from the clinical practice areas chosen by my new graduate peers. My personal history, talents, and aspirations all led me to find my home in pediatric oncology nursing. I feel truly passionate about pediatric oncology nursing and am grateful to begin my nursing career with these patients.

**KEYWORDS**

oncology; nursing; pediatric oncology; new graduate; employment; student nurse

**DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER**

10.1188/21.CJON.224

**RESOURCES**

- **Association of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Nurses**  
Partners with the National Student Nurses' Association to provide student-specific benefits  
<https://bit.ly/3dBsnlv>
- **Oncology Nursing Society**  
Provides educational and career development resources for students  
<https://bit.ly/3bvvyZf>
- **Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing**  
Allows students to apply for membership after completing half of their undergraduate program  
<https://bit.ly/3sfjan6>