



Preparing for a job interview

Róisín O'Connell advises internship students on how best to approach job interviews

IN RECENT weeks I have received many queries from internship students across the country about interviews and how to prepare for them. Very few people enjoy job interviews, particularly at the start of their career. They can seem daunting and scary due to the element of uncertainty, especially if you are not prepared. It's important to remember that everyone gets nervous in the lead-up to an interview. However, if you prepare well beforehand, you will be ready on the day.

Interviews for nursing and midwifery roles are often done by panels, meaning that you could have two or three people interviewing you. There will likely be someone from HR present, as well as someone from the clinical area and a member of senior management. Usually, while one person is asking you a question, another will be documenting your answers. Try not to be distracted by this.

The questions asked are usually competency based, but some questions may be designed to let the employer know how you might fit into their organisation. It is a good idea to prepare some answers for general questions that you might be asked, eg. 'Why did you want to become a nurse or midwife?' or 'Tell me a bit about yourself'. This is your opportunity to stand out and tell the employer why they should choose you. You must familiarise yourself with your CV or application, as anything you have written can be asked about during the interview.

Before the interview

Interview preparation should begin well before the day of the interview. Some employers will look up candidates online before the interview. Search your name to see what comes up and if there is anything there that you would like to remove.

Researching your prospective employer

is always beneficial. It helps if you can show a genuine interest in the organisation. This includes knowing about the ethos of the organisation or if it is known for its work in a particular specialty. It is very important to review the job description to see how well your skillset and CV match the role.

It is important to try to sleep well the night before, have a good breakfast and stay hydrated as these will all help you to focus and perform well. Know exactly where the interview is to take place to ensure you have allowed adequate time to get there. Aim to arrive ten minutes early and allow time for unexpected delays.

Turn your phone off, discard any chewing gum and dress appropriately. Wear smart but comfortable clothes. Some interviews may be held online, but the same principles should apply. If your interview is via a video call, be mindful of what is visible in the background.

During the interview

Make eye contact and smile when greeting your interviewers. Handshaking should be avoided in order to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Be aware of your body language and the way you communicate. Some people tend to slouch, fidget or speak too quickly when they become anxious. Similarly, some people tend to punctuate sentences with 'um' or 'ah' when nervous. Practising with friends/family beforehand and asking for honest feedback can help to make you aware of what to look out for. If you are unsure of the question, simply ask the interviewer to repeat it. This will offer you time to calm yourself down and think about your answer.

The 'STAR' technique (see Table) can be helpful when answering competency-based questions, as it can be used to

'STAR' technique	
Situation	Describe the event or situation that you were in
Task	Explain the task you had to complete
Action	Describe the specific actions you took to complete the task
Result	Close with the results of your efforts

demonstrate previous experience, eg. 'How would you prioritise your patient caseload?' or 'Tell me about a time you managed conflict on your ward'.

Some questions may be skills- or knowledge-based, eg. 'Tell me about the ISBARR', while others will focus on your professional development, eg. 'How do you keep up to date in your practice?'

Remember that you are applying for a staff nurse/midwife position, and so you should avoid limiting yourself by using phrases like 'I can't do that as I'm only an intern'. Instead, you could say what you would do as a staff nurse/midwife.

After the interview

Interviewers will often ask candidates if they have any questions and it can be helpful to come up with a few to demonstrate your interest. Thanking your interviewers for their time will leave them with a positive impression. Whether or not the interview goes well, you can ask for feedback on the interview after you are contacted with a result. This can help you to improve your interview skills for next occasion.

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