

Experience Needed

I will be a new R.N. but have 2 year Med-Surg experience. How much R.N. experience does travel nursing require?

This is one of the most common questions I encounter. The answer is sort of simple and sort of not simple. The hospitals and thus agencies will only require you to have 1 year of experience. That one year experience must be in whatever you plan on traveling in. If you want to travel as an RN, then you must have one year experience as an RN. If you want to work in Med/Surg, you must have one year experience as RN in Med/Surg.

On the other hand, are you ready to travel? Nursing is a tremendous responsibility. We are dealing with people's lives and have a license to maintain that we have worked very hard for. Then how do you decide if you personally have enough experience to travel?

What I often recommend is working a few days for your local registry before you take the risk of traveling to another state. A local registry will require similar documentation as that of a travel company for employment. You will be asked to competently function in a new setting with very little or no orientation. If you can do this, you can travel. Working local registry, lets you try it out for a day to decide how you feel about it in your home town, without committing to a three month contract away from home only to find out that you don't like it or feel ready do it.

Also, try working a couple of places in town through the registry and take note how you feel in each setting. Traveling helps you realize how different you will feel about yourself and your abilities depending on the work environment you are in. In one place you may feel more competent than most of the staff. Meanwhile, in other places, you may feel challenged. How does this feel for you? Are you still able to function well?

One of the good things about traveling is that the weird feeling usually goes away after the first few weeks as you get to know the place, know where things are, and form friendships with people. Registry takes longer to feel this way because you may only visit a day and then be gone for awhile.

Overall, I find that many nurses end up doing better than they thought they would in a new setting. Some really like the challenge of it and feel it makes them a better nurse.