

PICU Travelers: what to expect

As a traveler, you learn that all hospitals are different and all departments are different. Recently, I ran into a PICU nurse, Fred, who travels. 'I asked Fred to give me some concrete examples of how the PICU is different from place to place.

His response was interesting. He explained how places are different from giving drugs to management to orientation. For example, some places won't let you push lasix because they say it is ototoxic while other places push it, Fred says. Same goes for Albumin and Mannitol. Also, some places won't let you mix blood products in the same line such as blood and FFP and some will. I have found these differences really interesting.

Some places differ on where they have IV teams available and other staff support such as: techs that are available to run errands for you like going to get blood or getting supplies to draw blood. Sometimes they have someone available to take vitals for you. The place I am working at right now has a crisis nurse. I really like this set up. The crisis nurse floats around and helps the nurses, gives them breaks and helps during emergencies.

Several states now have mandatory staffing ratios, but some don't. When I work in Florida they don't have any laws and I may have 3 patients in the PICU.

More and more hospitals are becoming more family centered in the ICU. However, they all vary on the level of involvement the family has. One facility even allows the family to be there during codes.

Bigger hospitals seem to have better technology and more knowledge about medications. One time I was at a small hospital assisting with a Lumbar Puncture. They were going to give Morphine for sedation until I informed them about versed. They used it and it worked great.

Finally, upon interviewing I always ask how often I will float. Some places all the nurses alternate on the floating schedule and other places always send the travelers first."

We are fortunate that Fred is willing to share this information. I hope this article helps PICU travelers with some questions they may want to ask before deciding on an assignment. It's easier to handle situations if you are mentally prepared for them.