

Contracts

I once talked to a wealthy business man who said, “business without a contract is bad business.” I agree. Contracts help clarify communication so everyone is on the same page, no pun intended. How do you know if the contract covers what you need to know? In this article, I will share with you the basic information that should be included in every travel contract, regardless of who you work for.

Guaranteed Hours

You want to make sure you have guaranteed hours. Some days hospitals find themselves better staffed than others. On those particular days, they often send nurses home early, especially agency staff. With guaranteed hours, the hospital must still pay you even if they send you home early. Most agencies negotiate with the hospital for at least 36 guaranteed hours a week. This guaranteed money needs to go to you and be clear in the contract.

If you only want to work a particular shift, have it in writing. Otherwise, if the hospital decides to change their mind about your shift when you get there, you may not get any backup from your agency.

When and where you will be working

Of course, it will be hard to claim your guaranteed hours if you go to the wrong hospital. The contract should spell out exactly where you are expected to work (location of the hospital, and the department), and when you agree to start. Your contract will include the date your contract begins and when it ends. This way there is no question as to when you have fulfilled your contract. Make sure to agree to a reasonable start date. Give yourself plenty of time to get there. When I traveled, I gave myself at least 2 weeks so I could take my time and enjoy the trip.

Your pay

Traveling is fun, but you still want to get paid for it. Make sure the contract specifies your hourly rate. Make sure you know how overtime is defined (after 8 hours or after 40 hours). Any bonuses, license reimbursement, and travel pay should also be mentioned.

Your benefits

What else are they going to provide besides your pay? For example, are you going to have health insurance? If so, what day of the contract will the insurance go into effect? Believe it or not, insurance is a common area for miscommunication. Agencies rarely go into detail about insurance unless you ask. You may be focused on so many other things that you forget to mention it. In the middle of the assignment, you may find that you weren't covered for the first month or two of the assignment.

Housing is another important consideration. Make sure your contract specifies whether your housing will be private or shared and what amenities are provided. Will they provide cable, a TV, furniture? Are you responsible for the electric?

Floating expectations

Finally, it is important that your contract addresses whether or not you are expected to float and to where you will float. You don't want to be thrown into situations you aren't comfortable with.

Sometimes, you'll go through all the steps and still forget something important, but at least you will have the basics covered. You are leaving the security of your predictable job at home to an entirely new situation. It is important you define it as well as possible. If a company is not willing to work with you on the details of the contract, you may want to reconsider whether you want to work with them. Their

approach to the contract gives you a good idea how well they would back you up if you get into an unfair situation.