

What It's Like to Be A Camp Nurse



“I wish every nurse had to work at a camp;
they’d get to experience what nursing really is.”

“. . . and then this camper camp up and asked me for a hug
because it was bedtime and his mom wasn’t here.”

“Camp Nursing is the best of all worlds; time to spend with
individuals who impact my life for better.”





Camp Nursing: A Life Style and a Job

Some nurses are naturals at camp. They enjoy campers and being outside, they want to practice nursing, and they get what Florence Nightingale meant when she wrote that a nurse's job is to "put people in the best place for nature to work on them."

A camp nurse spends time helping campers and staff with common human concerns: sore throats, homesickness, headache, cramps, sprained ankles, the common cold, and taking personal medications on time. Helping campers and staff cope with "simple" things should not be a blow to one's professional esteem; rather, the camp nurse sees it for what it is – a young person developing self-care skills. The camp nurse teaches as much as s/he provides care.

Camp nurses also work with people who have chronic health problems like allergies, asthma and diabetes. The individual's skill with self-management may need coaching from the nurse in a way that compliments the individual's developmental stage as well as camp practices. This might mean helping a child with diabetes maintain himself in spite of s'mores at the campfire or explaining why an 8-year old camper needs a counselor to carry their EpiPen® but a 15-year old camper may not (or need it even more!).

Camp nurses champion healthy camp practices from a community health perspective. That means the nurse must be able to effectively collaborate with other camp leaders (non-nurses). Health and safety at camp won't work if the only invested person is the nurse. There's a way to work with others that triggers their buy-in. The camp nurse's upbeat, can-do attitude accompanied by a style that seeks buy-in from stakeholders goes a long way at camp!

Characteristics of a Successful Camp Nurse

- Likes children and living in a child-centered environment.
- Has a sense of humor and appropriately uses it – often!
- Is adaptable; last minute changes are okay.
- Doesn't mind ants in his/her toothbrush once in a while.
- Is comfortable going beyond the job description by taking an active part in the camp community.
- Has keen communication skills and uses them; keeps the camp director informed, actively listens to campers, shares appropriate information with other staff, and can talk effectively with parents.
- Enjoys participating; doesn't wait for a special invitation to join in.
- Can creatively adapt nursing interventions to the camp setting.
- Is detail-minded. Can keep paperwork organized, get medications passed on time, address camper and staff health needs, and still have time and energy to participate in a camp activity or two.
- Enjoys autonomous nursing practice but also knows personal limits; consults others when needed.

This Won't Work If . . .

- A schedule is something you expect to stick to.
- The sound of campers laughing, shouting and singing is "noise" to you.
- Interruptions in your day bring on Excedrin headaches.
- You're only at camp because you want your child to be there.
- You expect a nine-to-five day.
- Living with no air conditioning, having mosquito bites, and going without a blow-dryer is your idea of penance.
- You're expecting the Hilton and you get one electric outlet, no maid service, and an occasional chipmunk for a roommate.
- Taking care of sore throats, upset stomachs, sprained ankles and lonesome children insults your professional image.

