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8-Steps To Work In The U.S. As A Nurse

There are eight key steps foreign-educated nurses will need to take in order to obtain a position as an RN in a U.S. hospital.

1. Meet the educational requirements
2. Take and pass an English language proficiency test, if mandated.
3. Obtain credential evaluation
4. Pass your National Council Licensing Examination-Registered Nurse (NCLEX – RN)
5. Find a nursing recruiting agency or US-based employer
6. Apply and obtain an RN immigrant visa/green card
7. RN visa interview and medical examination
8. Accept an RN position

Education

First and foremost, international educated nurses must meet basic education requirements. These include:

- Graduation from an accredited Registered Nursing program
- Licensing as a Registered Nurse (RN)
- Experience practicing as an RN for at least two years

Licensed practical nurses, licensed vocational nurses, and patient care assistants are not eligible to transfer their licenses to the United States.

While the aforementioned are required, most states also require foreign-educated nurses to complete a Foreign Educated Nurses (FEN) refresher course. The course consists of 120 hours in the classroom and 120 hours of clinical practice under the supervision of a licensed Registered Nurse.

English Language Proficiency Tests

After meeting the initial education requirements, some foreign educated nurses must take and pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). This will vary depending on the country of origin and results are sent directly to the state nursing board.

Nurses who went to nursing school in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada (except Quebec), or Ireland are exempt as are those whose spoken language in nursing school was English and/or the nursing school textbooks were written in English.

Pass The NCLEX Examination

After ensuring you meet the education and language requirements it's time to apply for the NCLEX in the state of intended employment. Registration with [Pearson Vue](#) is required and costs \$200 plus additional foreign fees.

According to the webpage, NCLEX examinations are currently administered in Australia, Canada, England, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Mexico, Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Taiwan.

Credentials Evaluation And Reports

The [Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools \(CGFNS\)](#) is a company that is employed by State Boards of Nursing to ensure that applicants meet the basic requirements and are fit to take the NCLEX.

Established in 1977 after a thorough investigation of the immigration of foreign-born and educated registered nurses, the U.S. Department of State and Labor developed the Commission with a dual purpose: to ensure safe patient care to Americans and to help prevent the exploitation of graduates from foreign nursing schools who are employed in the United States to practice.

This company specifically will go through all nursing school transcripts and education history from your home country. While this company is the most popular and most well known - it is expensive and each state requires different levels of credentialing.

There are three main credentialing reports:

1. Credentials Evaluation Service Professional Report
2. CGFNS Certification Program
3. Visa Credentials Assessment

Credentials Evaluation Service Professional Report

This report is less involved and cheaper than the Certificate Program or VisaScreen. It provides the basic information for the State Board of Nursing and only a handful of states accept this.

Below are the requirements you'll need to meet:

- English Requirement
- Secondary School Documents
- Licensure Documents from your Home Country
- Nursing Education Documents from your Home Country
- \$350 Fee

CGFNS Certification Program

This evaluation is the same as above but requires the applicant to take the CGFNS Qualifying Exam.

Here are some specifics:

- Everything in a Credentials Evaluation Service Professional Report
- CGFNS Qualifying Exam
- \$445 Fee

The CGFNS Qualifying Exam helps states determine if foreign-educated nurses are well suited to care for patients in America. According to the CGFNS web page, individuals must possess a wide variety of nursing knowledge.

Applicants are required to have a minimum number of classroom and clinical hours in required fields such as pediatric nursing, psychiatric nursing, neonatal nursing, and adult medical/surgical nursing.

The examination is held three times a year at over 40 testing centers across the globe. Individuals may travel to other countries, if needed, in order to take the exam.

Find CCNE-Accredited RN Programs

VisaScreen: Visa Credentials Assessment

The same requirements as the CGFNS Certification Program but will qualify the individual for a Work Visa after successful completion of the NCLEX.

You'll also need to pay a \$540 fee.

Other credentialing services could potentially be cheaper and still accepted by the State Boards of Nursing. It is important to check with the State Board before using a different credential service.

Alternatives to CGFNS include:

- International Education Research Foundation
- Educational Records Evaluation Service

Obtain Employment Visa "Work Visa"

The next step is to obtain an employment visa. There are several options for these nurses but nurses must have sponsorship from a staffing agency. It is easier for foreign nurses to work with an independent staffing recruiter and agency then directly with a hospital.

Agencies are well versed in helping nurses work in the U.S. and have systems in place in order to ensure all information and paperwork is completed accurately.

Mexican And Canadian Nurses - TN Visa

Mexican and Canadian nurses may work in the United States with a special TN visa if the individual has an offer of employment, a license to practice in their home country, and pass the NCLEX and state licensure requirements.

H-1B Temporary Work Visa

Nurses who hold a four-year degree and fulfill a specialized nursing role may qualify for an H-1B temporary work visa and then apply for a green card once stateside. These specialized roles include critical care nurses, emergency room nurses, and/or cardiology nurses.

It is important to note that there is a very limited number of H-1B visas available to nurses who want to work in very specific hospitals in underserved communities.

Permanent Work Visa

The majority of foreign-trained nurses will need to obtain a permanent work visa, otherwise known as a green card. This application needs to be completed prior to travel to the United States and the visa must be obtained before immigrating legally.

Nurses NOT Eligible To Work In The United States

Unfortunately, not all foreign-educated nurses are eligible to work in the United States. These include but are not limited to:

- Nurses with less than two years experience
- Nurses lacking a four-year nursing degree
- Individuals who have committed a crime
- Nurses who lack sponsorship from a reputable nursing agency