

Day-to-Day Life of the Nurse

An Insider's Look at Rounding

You learned about hospital rounds in nursing school, and you probably observed rounds during your period of nursing orientation. But now that you're on your own, rounds might make you nervous. Did you remember to get all the vitals? Did you write down all the correct information?

What happens if you wind up in a situation that you don't know how to handle?



All of these questions are frightening to a first-year nurse. But with time and patience, you can hone your nursing rounds to perfection and not wonder if you're doing them the right way!

What to Expect from Nursing Rounds

There are two types of rounds you typically undertake. One is the nursing rounds, during which you check on your patients on a regular schedule. The other is multidisciplinary rounds, which often take place in the morning hours, and include physicians, therapists, and others that are involved in the care of patients on your floor.

During the rounds with doctors, let the physician take the lead. The most important thing you can do during the multidisciplinary rounds is to listen carefully to any changes the doctor might make in treatment. This is when you and the physician can put your heads together and figure out what the next course of action should be.

Nursing Tips for Doing Hospital Rounds

The more you know about doing rounds, the better prepared you will be to cover all the bases. This nursing rounding cheat sheet can help ease the mind of a first-year nurse:

- **Do rounds frequently.** Doctors might make rounds only once or twice a day, but you may make them once an hour. Ask seasoned nurses how often rounds are made, but recognize that some patients need more attention than others, so how often you make rounds might be modified from day to day.

- **Write it down.** Always carry paper and pen with you when you do your rounds. Be prepared to write down anything of importance in the patient's chart.
- **Use the pain scale.** Pain control is a very important part of nursing. Always gauge your patient's pain level by looking for physical clues, as well as asking them to rate their pain on a scale. If your patient's pain level has increased dramatically since the last time you came into the room but the pain medication was delivered right on schedule, their condition might be getting worse.
- **Check the meds.** Is your patient due for medication? Scan the charts before your rounds and make note of what each patient needs. Always wake a sleeping patient if they are due for medications. If they ask for pain medication before it's due, make note of it--their pain management plan might need to be changed.
- **Check the bedside tables.** Is the call button within reach? Is the telephone nearby? Does the patient have a pitcher of water and a glass of ice? Is there anything else they might want but can't reach, such as that magazine on the chair?
- **Make your patient comfortable.** Fluff pillows, offer an extra blanket, and ask them what they need. Even the smallest comfort can feel luxurious when you're sick. For example, oxygen can lead to dry lips--do they need lip balm? Muscle aches can result from lying in bed too long--do they need a pillow to press between their knees or hold against their chest to make them more comfortable?
- **Tell them when you will return.** Tell the patient when you will be around to check on them again. This reassures the patient and might cut down on the use of the call button, freeing up more time for you and the other nurses to handle charting duties and the like.
- **Talk.** Asking about a patient's family or telling them about something you read in the newspaper can make the process of taking their vitals fly by for both of you. Your friendly smile and compassionate demeanor will go a long way toward making your patient feel comfortable.

Nursing rounds help give you a complete picture of a patient's progress, but regular rounds provide more than that--they also make the patient feel secure. Checking in with a patient during your rounds has a physical, mental, and emotional impact. In short, they feel better--and isn't that what nursing is all about?

An Insider's Look at Night Shift vs. Day Shift

The world of medicine is always moving, and nursing never sleeps. As a first-year nurse, you might not be able to choose whether you work day shift or night shift, but you can find plenty of ways to cope with whatever shift you are given.

Shifts and the First-Year Nurse: What to Expect

When you were fresh out of nursing school and searching for nursing jobs, you probably found that many facilities required first-year nurses to start out on a particular shift. Most shifts are from 8 hours to 12 hours, but some nurses can split shifts with others, and work only 4 hours or 6 hours at a time.

Which shift you pull depends a great deal on where you are in the country and what your facility needs. However, if there is a very pressing reason why you need one shift over another, you might be able to get it. Or you might be able to switch up shifts with other nurses, and work a combination of nights and days.

It never hurts to try.

Nursing: A Typical Day Shift

During a typical day shift, you arrive at the floor about thirty minutes ahead of schedule. You meet with the outgoing nurse and go over patient charts. What happened during the night, and what should be done to continue care today?

Soon after you arrive, you complete nursing rounds, and possibly hospital rounds with the physicians as well. Throughout the day there are orders for treatment and procedures that have to be performed. You consult with doctors on a regular basis, and handle paperwork for patients being admitted, as well as those being discharged.

Day shift is much busier than night shift, and not only because the hospital is working with a larger staff. Food service traditionally makes the rounds three times daily, and in most areas of the facility, visiting hours are in effect.

Nursing: A Typical Night Shift

When working the night shift, you should arrive early to check in with the day shift nurse. Make certain you understand any changes in the treatment orders that were made by the doctor, and then do your first nursing rounds.

Those who work the night shift might have a



much quieter time than those who worked during the day. Many patients will be sound asleep. Visiting hours are typically over. There are usually no food deliveries in the middle of the night. Often the quiet time you have is filled with paperwork, preparations for morning duties, and wrapping up anything that the day shift didn't have the time to finish.

Though you usually have more time to take small breaks, the night shift may not always be peaceful. You still have patients that need to be admitted through the emergency room, patients who take a turn for the worse and other surprises that can turn a routine shift into an adventure.

Nursing Tips: How to Handle Any Shift

Whether you are on night shift or day shift, there are a few rules that apply and can make your shifts much easier:

- **Don't gossip.** Sometimes there may be a bit of competition among the shifts in the hospital. Usually this is a good-natured competition between day shift and night shift, but sometimes jealousy and negative gossip can get into the mix. Rise above the fray and resolve to ignore any gossip you might hear.
- **Get enough sleep.** Working long shifts can wreck havoc on your natural body rhythms. Take a one-hour nap before you begin your night shift, and go to sleep when you get home from work. If you are working the day shift, make sure you get plenty of sleep during the night before. A well-rested nurse is a much more effective nurse.



- **Get it done.** Finish as much work as you can during your shift, and avoid leaving more work for those nurses who come to the floor after you. They may appreciate the courtesy and probably return the favor.

Your body should learn to adjust to whatever shift you are working, and soon the long hours should feel like second nature. It might be rough for the first few weeks, but if you can tough it out, you will soon be going with the flow, just like the most experienced nurses on the floor.