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The Pros and Cons of Travel Nursing

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Summary:

Travel nursing is an attractive arrangement for many nurses. Assignments typically last thirteen weeks and the nurse is often given the option of renewing at the end of each assignment. For the outgoing nurse, who makes friends easily and likes change, travel nursing can be a wonderful career.

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Article Body:

Travel nursing is an attractive arrangement for many nurses. Assignments typically last thirteen weeks and the nurse is often given the option of renewing at the end of each assignment. For the outgoing nurse, who makes friends easily and likes change, travel nursing can be a wonderful career. Some nursing specialties are in greater demand than others, and for those with critical care, emergency room, intensive care unit, operating room, neonatal or labor and delivery experience, a travel nursing job should be easy to find. While travel nursing used to comprise a niche field within the nursing industry, it has become a mainstream career choice for many nurses.

<b>The Pros of Travel Nursing</b>

There are many benefits to travel nursing, the first of which is, of course, the travel. Travelers are able to work anywhere in the country, and, if they find an area not to their liking, they know the assignment will be over soon. If they fall in love with the hospital or the area of the country, they can ask to have their contract renewed. Another pro of travel nursing is the pay. While nurses are in demand everywhere, tightening of hospital budgets have left many staff nurse salaries stagnant. Travel nurses typically earn 20% more than a traditionally employed nurse in the same specialty.

Another benefit of travel nursing is the fact that, when travel nursing, you are not drawn into the politics that a full or part time nurse would encounter. This includes everything from dueling supervisors to mandatory in-service meetings. While you will certainly make friends while on assignment, you will normally work your shift, maybe some overtime, and then head home. The lack of politics in these positions is a big draw for many nurses.

The flexibility of the travel nursing schedule is another benefit. Many travel nurses routinely take a week or two, or even a month off, between assignments. The higher pay rate allows the travel nurse this flexibility, and, by letting his or her agency know when they are available, he or she will have a position waiting after their break.

<b>The Cons of Travel Nursing</b>

Of course, if travel nursing were perfect, everyone would do it. There are drawbacks to travel nursing, and it is not for everyone. Travel nurses may not receive all of the benefits of a full time employee. It is important to read your contract carefully, so that you understand exactly what to expect. While many travel nurses do not receive paid time off, some do, and it can be negotiated into your contract. Health insurance is typically offered, but it will likely be more expensive than what is offered to full and part time staff at the hospital.

Some of the cons of travel nursing are apparent, and if they do not appeal to you, then travel nursing may not be a good choice for you. Travel nursing means that you will pack up your scrubs and move often, as often as every 13 weeks. While some people relish these frequent changes, others find it stressful. Another point to consider is that as reassuring as it is to know that you are not locked into a long term contract if the situation is less than ideal, you are also not guaranteed employment past your initial assignment. Frequent moves can be stressful for other reasons as well. With each new job, the hospital may require you to pass a competency exam or they can terminate your employment, for those who do not test well, this can be very stressful. There will be a new orientation with each new assignment as well.

Another problem that many travel nurses encounter is passive or even open hostilities toward travelers from the staff. Because it is widely known that travel nurses receive a higher pay rate and more flexibility than staff nurses, there is often resentment among the other nurses. Also, the management may feel that the travel nurse should pull more of the unattractive assignments, since there is no concern of retention with the traveler. These two factors can ruin a travel nursing experience.

Another negative aspect of travel nursing, and the one that can be most detrimental to the nurse in the long run, is the lack of career advancement. Most travel nurse contracts specifically forbid the nurse from holding any type of supervisory role. While this may be appealing to the traveler initially, once he or she is ready to head into more traditional work, their lack of supervisor experience can limit job opportunities.

Travel nursing can be a wonderful experience if your temperament is suited for the work. Take the time to find a recruiter or agency that you feel comfortable with, and if you find an assignment that you enjoy, don't feel shy about asking for a contract renewal.