

Someday I'd like to be a...

Flight Nurse

Someday I'd like to be a...



Meet Debbie Medlin, RN

Flight Nurse

WakeMed Health & Hospitals

“As a flight nurse, I provide life-sustaining care to patients in an air ambulance while they are being transferred. Our aircraft is equipped to serve as a mini ICU, allowing us to care for critically ill patients.”

WHAT A FLIGHT NURSE DOES

I am part of a flight crew team, and I provide primary care to critical patients who are being transported in an air ambulance (helicopter). The majority of patients are being transferred from one facility to another, but we also transport patients from the scene of an accident.

MY TYPICAL WORK DAY

I work a 12-hour shift, from 7 am to 7 pm. When I first arrive, we have a debriefing with the outgoing crew, check the aircraft to ensure we have the equipment and medications we need, and have a pre-flight safety briefing with the pilot. We make rounds in the emergency department and the ICUs to check in with the unit managers. Then we wait for requests for transfers to come in via radio. Once we get a request, we board the aircraft and begin the journey to pick the patient up and provide him with the care he needs while transporting him to the most appropriate facility.

THE MOST REWARDING PART OF MY JOB

When I do rounds in the hospital and follow-up on patients that I have cared for, it's a wonderful feeling seeing them again. They remember me and thank me for getting them where they needed to be.

WHY I CHOSE THIS CAREER

After working in the emergency department for so many years I thought this job would be a good career challenge for me. In the air, it's just me and my partner caring for the patient. It is stressful, challenging and very rewarding.

EDUCATION BACKGROUND/PRIOR EXPERIENCE

I have an associate degree in nursing and am currently working on my bachelor's degree. I also have the required certifications for this job. These include Basic Life Support, Pediatric Advanced Life Support and Pre-Hospital Trauma Life Support. I am also an Advanced Cardiac Life Support instructor and an active member in the Emergency Nurse's Association. I have been at WakeMed for almost 21 years and have worked the majority of my time in the emergency department. I worked in Mobile Critical Care Services for two years before becoming a member of the inaugural flight crew five years ago.

SCHOOL SUBJECTS TO FOCUS ON

Some high schools – like the Wake Early College for Health and Sciences – offer a nursing assistant program. If you have the opportunity to attend a school that offers a nursing assistant program, it would be beneficial to get that training before starting nursing school. Once you have a nursing degree, I recommend working in an emergency department or critical care unit. An air ambulance functions like a mini emergency department in the air so having experience on handling critical situations is imperative.

