



2026 EDITION

THE AGENCY NURSE STARTER GUIDE

Everything You Need to Start, Succeed, and Thrive

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CHAPTER 1

What Agency Nursing Actually Looks Like Day-to-Day

Agency nursing means working as an independent contractor or W-2 employee placed at different healthcare facilities by a staffing agency like Fahari. Unlike permanent staff, you choose your assignments, your schedule, and often your location.

On a typical shift, you will check in at the nurses station, receive a brief orientation to the unit, and be assigned a patient load. You are expected to hit the ground running — knowing your scope of practice, documenting accurately, and communicating clearly with permanent staff.

The key difference: you are a professional guest. Come prepared, be adaptable, and represent Fahari's standard of care.

CHAPTER 2

Credentialing Checklist: What Every Facility Requires

Before your first assignment, you will need to complete a credentialing package. The standard requirements are:

- Active nursing license (RN, LPN/LVN, CNA) — verified with your state board
- BLS/CPR certification (American Heart Association preferred)
- TB skin test or chest X-ray within 12 months
- Government-issued photo ID
- Social Security verification
- Resume with at least 1 year of clinical experience
- Professional references (2 minimum)
- COVID-19 vaccination card (required by most facilities)

Specialty units (ICU, ER, L&D) may require additional certifications such as ACLS, PALS, or NRP. Upload all documents once through the Fahari credentialing portal — we maintain your file and notify you of upcoming expirations.

CHAPTER 3

Understanding Your Pay: Bill Rates, Pay Rates, and Overtime

As an agency nurse, your pay structure differs from permanent employees. Here is how it works:

Bill Rate: The amount the facility pays Fahari per hour for your services. This is not your take-home pay.

Pay Rate: The amount Fahari pays you per hour. This is negotiated based on your credentials, specialty, and shift type.

Per Diem Differential: Extra pay for working evenings, nights, weekends, or holidays. Always ask about differentials before accepting an assignment.

Overtime: Anything over 40 hours in a week is paid at 1.5× your base rate as a W-2 employee. Confirm your status with your recruiter.

Choosing Between Per Diem and Travel Assignments

Per Diem (PRN): Day-to-day shifts at local facilities. Maximum flexibility, no housing stipend, work as much or as little as you choose. Best for nurses who want supplemental income alongside a primary job.

Travel Assignment: 8–26 week contracts at facilities that may be far from home. Includes a tax-free housing stipend, travel reimbursement, and a higher bill rate. Best for adventurous nurses seeking higher earnings and new experiences.

Strike/Crisis: Short-term, high-pay assignments during labor actions or surge events. Fahari handles all logistics — housing, travel, and orientation. Response time is typically 24–72 hours.

CHAPTER 5

Your First Shift: What to Expect and How to Impress

Arrive 10–15 minutes early. Introduce yourself to the charge nurse and ask for a brief unit walkthrough.

Know your assignment before you leave: patient load, acuity levels, documentation system, and emergency protocols.

Document carefully. Facilities review agency nurse charting closely. Accurate, timely documentation protects you and your patients.

Communicate proactively. If you are unsure about a protocol, ask. No one expects agency nurses to know every facility's quirks — they expect you to ask the right questions.

A strong first shift leads to recurrent bookings at that facility — which means stable income and a shorter commute.

Building a Long-Term Agency Career

The best agency nurses build relationships with their recruiters, keep their credentials current, and maintain a list of preferred facilities where they perform well.

Track your certifications. Set reminders 60 days before any license or certification expires. Fahari will also notify you — but your license is your responsibility.

Ask for feedback. After your first few assignments, ask your recruiter how facilities rated your performance. Use that feedback to sharpen your skills.

Diversify your specialties. The more unit types you can float to, the more assignments you will be offered — and the higher your earning potential.

Fahari is your partner in building a sustainable, flexible, well-compensated nursing career. We are here for every shift, every question, and every milestone.