

You can now ask your employer for more flexible hours, but success is more likely if you come up with a plan that suits them as well, says Nicola Davies

THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Long work hours and on-the-job stress can make it difficult for nurses to achieve a good work-life balance. Recent changes in UK law mean that all employees can legally approach their employers to request flexible working hours (see box). Could you benefit from a flexible work schedule? If so, how should you approach your manager with this request? Here are some tips to help you create a work-life balance that fits your career and lifestyle.

Build a plan

One of the most common reasons for managers rejecting flexible working hours requests is the lack of a practical plan. Check the employee handbook and policies for any internal guidance on flexible working hours, and make that your starting point. Talk to the human resources department about acceptable options and speak to other employees who already have flexible working arrangements. Once you have this information, build a plan. This can be used to explain to your manager how you intend to complete all your duties within your flexible hours. Make your plan as clear as possible, factoring in the unpredictability of nursing.

Be formal

Verbal requests or agreements are not legally binding and should

Options for changing schedules

- ▶ Home or remote working.
- ▶ Temporary or short-term contract.
- ▶ Part-time hours, job sharing, flexi-time, shift work.
- ▶ Compressed, annualised, staggered hours.
- ▶ Phased retirement.

be avoided when making work schedule requests. Make your request in writing and keep records of replies. Submit your detailed plan including what you expect, your proposed work arrangement and how you intend to complete your duties within your flexible schedule. It is also worth recording any impact your schedule might have on your co-workers and patients, as well as any remedies you can offer. If you expect employers to be flexible, you must be flexible too.

Put it in perspective

While flexible working hours will be advantageous for you, there has to be something in it for your employer as well – better productivity on your part, overlapping your hours with a shift that is constantly understaffed, preventing burnout, for example. Take care not to sound disingenuous by suggesting that your request is solely for the employer's benefit. List benefits

for both your employer and yourself and offer good reasons all round for your employer to consider your modified schedule.

Request a discussion

Employers are not obliged to discuss the request with the employee before granting or rejecting it, but it is good practice. In a discussion, be clear about your life situation and why you need to work flexibly. Avoid confrontation and be prepared to negotiate your schedule. Suggest a trial period to assess the impact of the new arrangement. Always request a written response to your request.

A balance between work and personal life is becoming increasingly important in today's hectic working environment. As a consequence, views on workplace hours are shifting and new laws are emerging that support modified work structures. Reasonable requests for flexible work arrangements can prove to be beneficial to the employer and the employee.

So, when approaching your manager, be tactful in your manner while also presenting a solid plan for how you will complete your responsibilities within the modified work schedule you are requesting **NS**

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RESOURCES

ACAS guide on flexible working
tinyurl.com/FWACAS
Flexible working www.gov.uk/flexible-working/overview