



# POLISHING YOUR RESUME AND CURRICULUM VITA

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## **Polishing Your Resume and Curriculum Vita**

**By Pat Iyer**

You present your credentials to an attorney in the form of a resume or curriculum vita (CV). What's the difference? A resume is a concise one to two page document that highlights your skills, education, and experience. A CV is a longer document prepared by people with extensive teaching, research or publishing experience. The difference between a CV and a resume is primarily in the area of focus and length. A resume is something that is brief that describes your primary areas of responsibility. A CV tends to go into a greater depth of information. Both documents include strong action words to emphasize accomplishments like "created", "initiated", "saved", "accelerated", "launched", "strengthened", and "broadened".

There is no set number of pages for a CV. It can be three pages; it can be longer. Physician experts tend to go on a great length in their CVs and emphasize every publication and accomplishment. Many nursing expert witnesses also have CVs that are quite lengthy.

Your resume or CV is your first opportunity to make an impression on your prospect, client or potential employer. It is an important

document for you to market your skills as a legal nurse consultant. People will use it to determine if they want to give you a chance.

I look at over 100 resumes and CVs a year. Documents with typos automatically go into a reject pile. If people cannot proofread their own resumes and CVs I know they are not going to be able to proofread the kinds of involved reports that we produce as legal nurse consultants. The documents I see come from people who want me to hire them as an employer or as a subcontractor. I can tell at a glance in the individual knows how to coherently put together his or her credentials.

This chapter shares tips you can use to hone your resume or CV to make the best possible presentation of your skills. The primary purpose of these is to convey your expertise, to tell who you are and to show your accomplishments. It is best to have only one version of a resume or CV that describes your professional accomplishments and contributions to the nursing profession. When you're a testifying expert it's not very comfortable to be up on the stand and have a second or third version of your CV appear in court and that's not the CV you've supplied to the attorneys. You don't ever want to give the impression that you're trying to hide something.

### **Formatting**

The heading of your document is the place to provide your vital contact information. Sometimes the expert accidentally leaves off details such as telephone number, mailing address and email addresses. I have found errors in these details, making it very difficult to reach the person. Have a complete and accurate heading on the top of the first page of your document.

Use an appropriate and professional email address. It is easy and free to set up a Gmail address. Avoid inappropriate email addresses

like [hotmomma@hotmail.com](mailto:hotmomma@hotmail.com) or [bensmom@yahoo.com](mailto:bensmom@yahoo.com), or [poodlelover@gmail.com](mailto:poodlelover@gmail.com).

Next, list your education and your certifications. Your listing of education typically starts with your highest academic degree and then works backwards. Include any certifications you hold, including the type of certification and the year it was awarded. Spell out the name of the certification because not everyone is familiar with the abbreviations.

Provide your work experience. It is not necessary to list the street address and phone number of your employers. What is important is to identify where you worked, your job title at the time and your major responsibilities and accomplishments. It's more impressive to write down that you were a manager of the department that served over 30,000 patients per year and you trained and supervised 40 RNs than it is to say that you were the nurse manager of an emergency department.

Avoid having dull job descriptions. Legal nurse consultants who are marketing to attorneys may be asked for a resume and should be emphasizing their clinical knowledge and their publications, if they have them, to help demonstrate a breadth of knowledge or a deep area of expertise in a particular clinical area.

Professional association memberships are credentials that are commonly stated in addition to the accomplishments which I have mentioned. Include any leadership positions you assumed within these organizations.

### **Curriculum Vitae**

The content of a CV expands upon the education, certifications and employment of the individual. This person may have been involved in research, teaching, grants, and other activities. If you are a

professor, list your area of clinical involvement. Recently a professor contacted us at Med League about doing expert witness work. She did not specify the clinical areas where she supervised students. That makes a difference in terms of what kinds of cases we would be able to forward to her.

You may also see grants and awards listed in the curriculum vitae. Sometimes you'll see academic activities of that person if he or she is in a faculty position.

### **Publications**

List publications on your resume or CV. Gaining credibility through writing is a wonderful way to boost your legal nurse consulting career. Publications in respected peer reviewed journals carry more weight than in non-peer reviewed journals. If you have contributed to a book that has not yet been published, list the publication date as "In press". Enhance your career as a legal nurse consultant by seeking opportunities to become published. Get more guidance on how to do this by reading Patricia Iyer and Al S. Brown, *How To Get Published*, available at [www.patiyer.com](http://www.patiyer.com).

### **Continuing Education Programs**

Occasionally I see resumes that list continuing education programs. Sometimes it is not clear if these are programs the nurse attended or taught. Listing programs you have taught makes it easy for opposing counsel to request you to produce the course materials that would relate to your opinions as an expert witness. I don't see the point of making the job of opposing counsel easier.

### **Design Principles**

The design of your resume or CV will attract or repel your reader. It is that simple and critical. Your document must be easy to read and

follow and be succinct. By succinct I mean you do not need to list every single professional thing that you've ever done in your life.

## **Fonts**

Use a size 12 font. Don't use a smaller font in order to adhere to a restriction to keep your resume to two pages. This rule is not as important within the legal world. I looked at two page resume that came to me from an individual who is interested in doing expert witness work for us. She used a size 9 font, which many of the people would have trouble deciphering. I know she wanted to keep her document to two pages so she chose a very small font rather than to go on to a third page or fourth page.

Think about your reader and whether that font is going to make it hard for that individual to read your document. Select one font; keep it clean and simple. Use standard fonts– Times New Roman, Georgia, and Calibri are good fonts to use. Avoid very artistic fonts – the ones that are written out in script, almost like handwriting. It's just going to be difficult for your viewer to be read those.

Use bold sparingly. Use it to amplify parts of your document such as the name of the facility where you worked or your job title. Avoid italics because they are also hard to read and don't use bold and underline together because redundant. Before we had computers, the only way we could emphasize documents was by underlining them. Putting underlining under bold is a carryover from the typewriter days.

## **Margins**

One-inch margins all around are ideal. Some people try to stretch the document by having 1-and-a-half-inch margins, which looks like padding. Some people make narrow margins so that they don't

have longer documents; then the page looks crowded. It's better to use an extra page than it is to have a real narrow margin.

## **Page Numbering**

Page numbering is important. Your document could be dropped and become out of order. Help your reader by putting your name and page number on every page. (The page number does not go on the first page.) I can spot people who don't know how to use the automatic page numbering. They type in their name and the page number at the top of each document. The way that I find this out is that if I open up the document and check it or fix spacing for that individual before returning that resume to them, their header jumps down so that it's at the bottom of the page instead of at the top of the page. Learn how to use your automatic page numbering of your software. That will separate you from the amateurs.

## **Bullets**

You can use bullets when you have a lot of short phrases. We have been trained by looking at the internet to do a lot of scanning as opposed to reading, so we appreciate bullets.

## **Style**

Make sure that you describe your past job experience in past tense and current job in present tense. Start with your most current education, job or business, publications, if you have them, and then work backwards.

Spell out abbreviations. Remember that most attorneys are not familiar with medical terms, abbreviations and other aspects of medical language. Don't use *nurse speak* –

When we drop off words in a sentence and write like we are charting on a medical record. Write in full sentences on your document so that the reader doesn't have to fill in information.

Use *parallelism*, which refers to selecting consistent forms of a word. For example, you might write that your job involved, "identifying patients who needed assessment, creating plans of care, and providing nursing care". Use the same form of that verb throughout that sentence. That's a good point to remember also when you're writing reports.

Logically name your file when you save it. Don't name it as "My CV 2012". Name it with your name, your first name, your last name and then CV (PatriciaIyerCV). Keep in mind if you're emailing your CV or resume to an individual, the recipient will want to save your file with a name that makes sense.

Look at your document to make sure that it's complete. Make sure that you've completely included your contact information – name, address, phone number and email address. Double check all details to make sure they are correct. Don't include details that you've gone to a particular program for legal nurse consulting training if you are an expert witness, because that looks like you're a hired gun and being an expert witness is your full-time occupation. Would you see a physician put on his CV or her CV that this person is doing expert work or went to a particular program to learn how to do expert work? It would be unusual to find that. However, if you are presenting yourself as a behind-the-scenes consultant, you might want to stress your legal nurse consulting education.

Don't list the fact that you are an expert witness on your CV. Don't list the names of the cases that you've worked on. Don't list the names of the attorneys that you have worked for. This makes it very



easy for the opposing counsel to contact those individuals and ask for copies of reports that you've written on those particular cases. They may indeed want that information but make them work for it; don't give them a path so that they can find it.

## **Exclusions**

What should you exclude from your resume or curriculum vitae? You don't need a career objective, such as, "Find a job in a progressive labor and delivery unit." That would be appropriate if you were applying for a job but it's not appropriate if you are looking for legal nurse consulting work.

It's also not necessary to include information like birth date, marriage date, names and ages of your children, hobbies, and extra-curricular activities. It's never really possible to anticipate it in advance how somebody is going to react to those. In this era of identity theft, be aware of protecting some private details. Do not list your social security number or license number.

Don't include stuffing – needless, extraneous details, everything that you have ever done. Don't misrepresent your credentials. You've probably read stories about people who have been caught in lies. If you lie about your skills or your background you're not going to be able to demonstrate them when you're working with attorneys. This is a fairly common issue in the general public that people inflate or misrepresent what they've done.

Errors on your resume can be very embarrassing – I've seen a number of resumes with errors in dates or spelling. Carefully proofread your document. Ask someone else to also proofread it. Carefully check the dates. Are they accurate? Do your dates overlap, showing you worked in more than one place at a time? You may have, but be sure the details are accurate.

How many errors do you find in the paragraph below?

1994 – 1997 Charge Nurse / Sub Acute Care

Carillon Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, Huntington, New York

Developed departmental policy and procedure related to Intravenous therapy management. Staff nurse in charge of patients with cardiac disease, orthopedic injuries and head trauma. Also cared for ophthalmology, neurological, oncology and Alzheimer unit. Reviewed medical records for deviations from established protocols. Responded to code blues throughout facility.

Make sure that your CV is accurate. Make sure that it's honest. Some people exaggerate their background. Some attorneys look for legal certification. Most of them really want educational credentials and experience but some of them will look for your legal nurse consulting credentials and there're several. There's CLNC, PLNC, ALNC. . . those are basically commercial types of certificates.

The American Association of Legal Nurse Consultants is the only professional non-profit association to offer certification. Sometimes you may need to explain your letters. We've been accused of alphabet soup in nursing.

### **Clarity about Degrees**

If you are in school working towards a degree, make sure it indicates when you have an expected graduation day. I have seen a couple of documents of people who are working on degrees who wrote their resumes in a way that implied that they already had them. So, you want to make sure that you truthful about the information and not misleading. Some people add the degree before it is earned, but include a "C" after the degree, as in PhD © to indicate she is a candidate for the degree.

## Phrases to Avoid

There are also some phrases that you should avoid in your documents. Here are some examples:

- “I’m an effective communicator.” Most all of us think as nurses that we’re effective communicators; that doesn’t really distinguish you from other people.
- “I’m detail-oriented.” Attorneys assume that this is going to be true. You can give an example in your cover letter or in an interview of how you picked up something in medical records that made a difference on a previous case, or something that happened to you in your job that made a difference, if you haven’t done cases yet.
- “References available upon request” is a phrase that’s now passé. Always assume that the attorney is going to conduct a web search on you. Mind your social media profile. If you are on LinkedIn or Facebook, remember that you will be projecting an image to people who might be interested in hiring you, so be careful about the pictures that you post. One of our expert witnesses posted a picture on Facebook of her in a bar drinking a bottle of beer. She was exposing her bra strap for reasons that I don’t understand. The picture was time-stamped with 3:20 in the afternoon. I sent her an email and said, “Do you really want this on your Facebook page? Do you want opposing counsel to pick up this picture of you can and cross-examine you on this in court, even though it’s not germane to the case? Think about how you are projecting your image to people.” She removed that picture the same afternoon.
- “I’m a team player” – as opposed to being a loner? That’s also a phrase that you don’t need to have on your document.

- “I can meet deadlines.” If you couldn’t, how long are you going to last in the field?

Follow conventional formats. Don’t organize your document like the table below with columns and rows. Remember that people are used to seeing information written out in more of a narrative form.

<b>Education:</b>	
10/98	<p><b>Masters of Science in Physical Therapy</b></p> <p>Neumann College</p> <p>Aston, PA</p>
5/92	<p><b>Bachelor of Science in General Science</b></p> <p>Concentration in Biology</p> <p>Alvernia College</p> <p>Reading, PA</p>

### **Self Evaluation**

Once you have polished your resume or CV, set it aside for a day. When you pick it up again, look at it with an objective eye. Is it a

fair representation of your skills? Is it interesting? Is it clear and easy to read? Use the questions below to look at your resume or CV as if you have never seen it before. Based on the information in this chapter, answer these questions. And remember to keep your document current so that you can supply it at a moment's notice to an attorney.

1. Is this a CV or a resume?
2. Does the document contain the basic contact information? Address, email, phone? Is it accurate?
3. Does the document list your work experience with accomplishments?
4. Do you list education and work experience in reverse chronological order? (Most recent, ending with least recent?)
5. What is your assessment of the design? (Easy to read, uncluttered, versus crowded?)
6. Did you use a standard font? Is the size readable?
7. Is the format consistent?
8. Does the document contain any of the items to be excluded? (Objective, pictures, personal information, personal references, stuffing, uncommon abbreviations, typographical or grammatical errors, inappropriate email address)

## **Resources**

<http://www.bestsampleresume.com/nursing-resumes.html>

[http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career\\_magazine/  
previous\\_issues/articles/0000/  
how\\_to\\_write\\_a\\_winning\\_resumeresource.com/resumeblog/](http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_magazine/previous_issues/articles/0000/how_to_write_a_winning_resumeresource.com/resumeblog/)

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