

International Recruitment to the Community

CASE STUDY

2023/#3



The Impact of Rising Airfares on International Nurses Coming to the UK

Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust

What was the issue?

The cost of flights has been rising steadily in recent years, due to factors including the cost of aviation fuel. Delays in obtaining visas to travel meant that sometimes nurses were only able to book flights a couple of weeks in advance, when fares are higher.

A survey of international nurses indicated a preference for direct flights, which are usually more expensive than flights with one or more stops.

What was the solution?

Trust staff identified several ways to reduce costs:

- Booking flights as early as possible, at least 5 weeks ahead, saved money.
- Booking flights with a stopover is significantly cheaper than booking direct flights.
- At Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust, having one person – Ella - booking the flights, meant she became the 'specialist' in finding the best fares and making bookings.

Challenges included:

As the process of booking online is time sensitive, a delay in someone else approving a purchase could mean losing out on competitive prices. Ella has a bank card and her spending limit was increased. Having a bank

card and being ready to pay, without need for further approval, helps obtain competitive prices when they become available.

Day of the week: searching online and booking on Mondays and Tuesdays resulted in lower prices than doing the booking on a Thursday or Friday.

Booking flights requires patience, as the initial search can give good prices, but once you go through to book the actual price increases. Repeating the search several times can yield a lower price. Repeating the search a few times using a different browser, device, or at a later time in the day also sometimes resulted in finding a lower price.

Helping Nurse Travellers

Listen to your Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs) and try and help them achieve a journey that is comfortable and without stressful issues. Although IENs may not feel comfortable with all aspects of the journey you have planned, it is important to explain to the nurses why you have made the journey this way.

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Even when booking a cohort of several nurses traveling together, make individual bookings for them, as the nurses will not know each other and cannot check in for each other (a lead traveller is required for joint bookings). The nurses may be traveling from different parts of the same country to the airport. Nurses are encouraged to communicate with each other and find out if they are travelling together.

Despite nurses preferring direct flights, we normally only book flights that include a stop. Stopovers in European countries require a transit visa. This brings new requirements for paperwork, travel to the consulate, which may be a long distance for some nurses. This brings additional delays and costs. Some of the European Schengen visa applications require money which the nurse would have to pay upfront. Even it will be reimbursed, it is an additional cost.

Flights with Air France via France have also resulted in challenges to nurse passengers, and we have now stopped booking all flights via European countries. We are booking indirect flights via Turkey and other countries without a need for a transit visa. It is important to communicate to those travelling that they are making a stopover and that it should not cause them a problem under normal circumstances.

Practical Tips

It takes about 20 minutes to make one booking, and as long as 45 minutes when you encounter issues.

Ensure you try booking with different devices, different browsers and ensure you get the best price available for that flight. Sometimes just stop and try again later.

Prices may be advertised in £/GBP in the initial advert but when you go to the actual website, it may be in \$/USD. This will mean having to check the current exchange rate.

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Check that you have paid for two suitcases and one piece of hand luggage – this should be standard.

Email communications: by giving a Trust contact email on the bookings, the staff member can monitor changes, delays or any issues. This does mean a lot of email traffic, so time should be allowed for this.

Create email templates for sending to IENs with checking in, travel information etc. This way no information is missed and time is saved.

What were the results?

We have been able to get better prices, sometimes saving over £1000 on the same flight and often saving £50 on a flight just by searching over and over before booking. This has led to overall reduced costs for the international programme.

We have avoided the requirement for transit visas by avoiding European stopovers.

We have booked early, giving the Trust and the nurses more time to prepare.

What lessons does the initiative hold for the organisation and for others?

Concentrate this work with one person or a few people in order to benefit from expertise; they will need some quiet uninterrupted time to do this work.

Be aware of transit visa requirements for certain countries, especially European countries post-Brexit.

Book earlier in the week rather than later in the week or on the weekend. The time of day booking the flight also impacts the price you are getting from your search.

Search again and again, even for the same flight using different browsers. The more you search on the same device sometimes the price goes up. If possible, try a different device.

Next steps and sustainability

Consolidate this work with one person for the organisation or integrated care system (ICS) if possible. Provide a Trust credit card, within the usual financial controls of your organisation.

Get feedback from your IENs and make changes to your procedure where necessary.

<https://future.nhs.uk/InternationalRecruitment/grouphome>