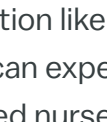




Career Resources

How to Become a CVOR Nurse



By **Moira K. McGhee** | May 25, 2023

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When a dying patient gets a new lease on life through the efforts of a cardiovascular operating room (CVOR) team, it's a celebration like no other. But losing a patient on the operating room table is one of the lowest lows a CVOR team can experience. The intense highs and lows of the CVOR are just one reason becoming a CVOR registered nurse (RN) isn't for the faint of heart.

CVOR registered nurses (RNs) play a crucial role in caring for patients when their hearts are in the most vulnerable state. They're a special breed of registered nurses (RN) with exceptional skills and knowledge, not to mention unique challenges. If you're drawn to this specialty, explore what it takes to enter this demanding nursing profession.

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What Does a CVOR Nurse Do?

Before learning what it takes to become a CVOR nurse, it helps to firmly understand what these specialized nurses do in the operating room. Cardiovascular operating room nurses are registered nurses who specialize in providing direct patient care to cardiovascular patients before, during and after surgeries on their heart and/or blood vessels. CVOR RNs work alongside cardiovascular surgeons and other surgical team members to ensure everything runs smoothly and patients receive the best possible care. Specific duties may include:

- Completing Preoperative Assessments
- Preparing Patients for Procedures
- Providing Intraoperative Patient Care
- Monitoring Vital Signs
- Applying Wound Dressings
- Providing Postoperative Patient care
- Educating Patients and Family Members

Steps to Becoming a CVOR Nurse

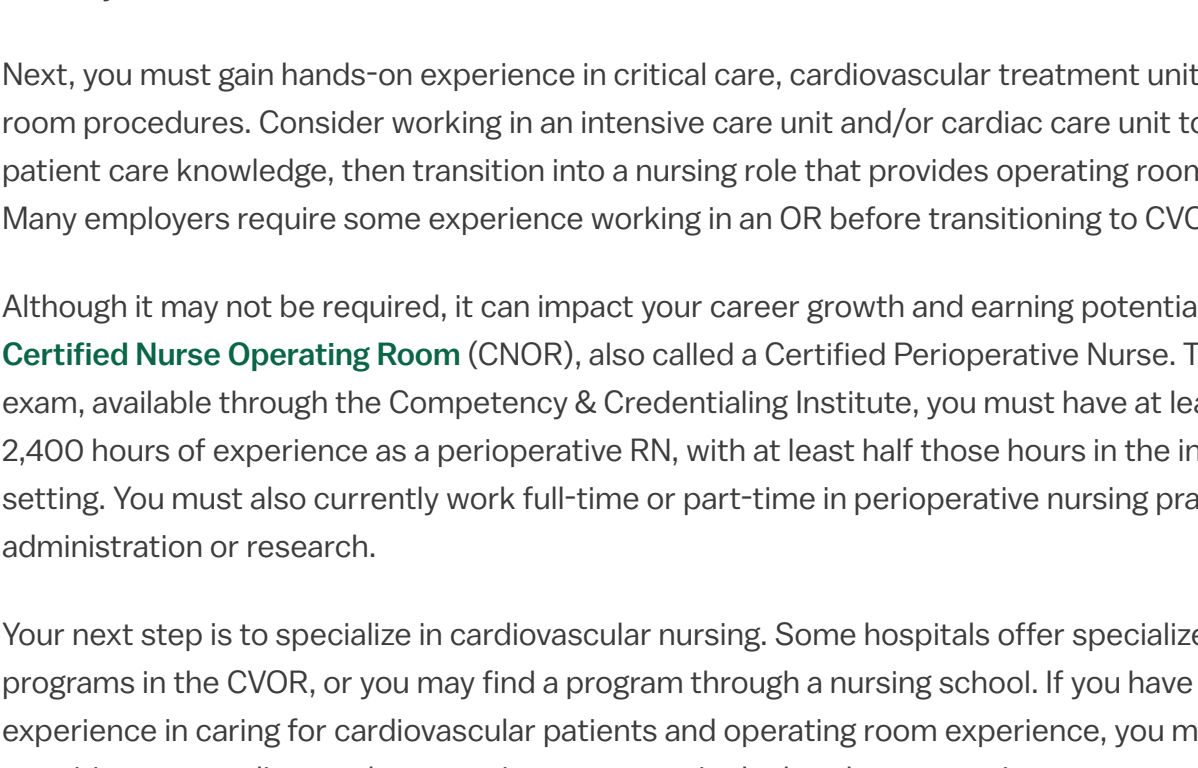
The initial steps to becoming a CVOR nurse are the same as all registered nurses. First, you must complete an accredited nursing program resulting in either an Associate of Science in Nursing or a **Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN)**. However, many employers prefer hiring BSN-trained RNs for the CVOR. Upon graduation, apply to your state board of nursing (BON) to start the **RN licensure process**.

Each state's licensing process can vary. However, most states require you to complete an application, submit your final transcript from your nursing degree program and submit to fingerprinting for a background check. You must pay an application fee to the state BON or other licensure authority, with a separate fee often required to complete the background check. Once you've submitted all the necessary documents, you apply to take the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX). You must **pass the NCLEX** to become a licensed RN.

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Many states offer a temporary nursing license that allows you to practice under the direct supervision of a licensed RN until you take your NCLEX. This license is generally valid for a set number of days but expires immediately if you fail the NCLEX. If you live in a state that's a member of the **Enhanced Nurse Licensure Compact**, you can apply for a multistate RN license that allows you to practice in all other Compact states.

Transitioning to CVOR Nursing



Armed with your RN license, you're ready to work your way into the cardiovascular operating room. Unlike some nursing specialties, CVOR nursing isn't something you can jump right into. It requires additional training and certification.

Like all registered nurses, you must obtain your **Basic Life Support certification** for healthcare professionals through a program accredited by the American Heart Association. Depending on the hospital, you may also need **Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support** certification since you often care for critically ill adults.

Next, you must gain hands-on experience in critical care, cardiovascular treatment units and/or operating room procedures. Consider working in an intensive care unit and/or cardiac care unit to gain valuable patient care knowledge, then transition into a nursing role that provides operating room experience. Many employers require some experience working in an OR before transitioning to CVOR nursing.

Although it may not be required, it can impact your career growth and earning potential to become a **Certified Nurse Operating Room (CNOR)**, also called a Certified Perioperative Nurse. To sit for the CNOR exam, available through the Competency & Credentialing Institute, you must have at least two years and 2,400 hours of experience as a perioperative RN, with at least half those hours in the intraoperative setting. You must also currently work full-time or part-time in perioperative nursing practice, education, administration or research.

Your next step is to specialize in cardiovascular nursing. Some hospitals offer specialized training programs in the CVOR, or you may find a program through a nursing school. If you have the prerequisite experience in caring for cardiovascular patients and operating room experience, you may be able to transition to a cardiovascular operating room to gain the hands-on experience you need to become a CVOR nurse.

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Skills Needed to be a Successful CVOR Nurse

While all nurses need similar skills to succeed in any specialized department, CVOR nurses need an extensive list of skills. One of the most essential skills is the ability to work well under pressure. CVOR nurses must be able to think quickly and make confident decisions while shifting priorities as situations change. They must understand cardiovascular OR equipment and have the mechanical and technical skills to troubleshoot it. Other essential skills for CVOR nurses include:

- Effective communication skills
- Attention to detail
- Strong organizational skills
- Time management skills
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Teamwork

Another vital skill that shouldn't be overlooked is resiliency to handle losing a patient. While the elation of seeing a patient come out of surgery in better shape than when they went in, the flip side is those operations that don't conclude with a positive outcome. Sometimes patients die. It's a reality CVOR nurses must be willing to face on any given day to continue being successful at their jobs.

Benefits of Becoming a CVOR Nurse

RNs may be drawn to the cardiovascular operating room for various reasons. Some RNs naturally seek roles they feel give them more opportunities to make a significant difference in patients' lives. Others may enjoy the fast-paced environment and/or the level of responsibility it brings. They may enjoy the challenge of obtaining specialized skills to provide their patients with the highest degree of care. Here are three more benefits of becoming a CVOR nurse that may tempt you to steer your nursing career in this direction.

High Demand

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women across the United States. The American Heart Association also states that nearly half of all adults in the nation have some type of cardiovascular disease. While not all heart-related problems require surgery, surgery is often the only option to address a variety of conditions, keeping CVOR nurses in high demand. These RNs are among the most sought-after in the nursing field for their wealth of knowledge and specialized skills crucial in the cardiovascular operating room.

Competitive Salary

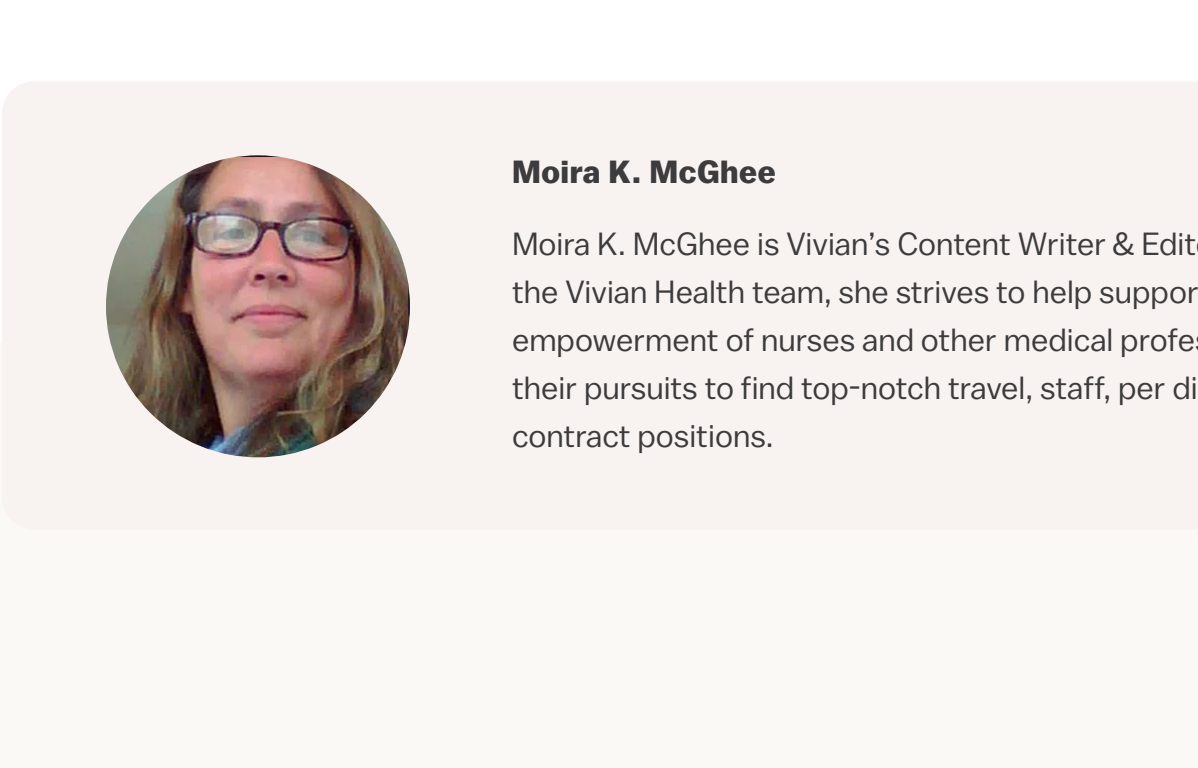
Cardiovascular operating room RNs are among the highest-paid nursing specialties. According to salary data posted on Vivian Health on May 25, 2023, **staff CVOR nurse salaries** averaged \$48.28 per hour, about 13% higher than the average nursing salary nationwide. Likewise, weekly **travel CVOR nurse wages** were \$2,830, about 21% more than the average pay nationwide for travel nurses. Keep in mind that these are the average wages; some CVOR nursing jobs pay even more.

Working with Cutting-Edge Technology

Healthcare is constantly evolving, and the CVOR isn't any different. New technology, equipment and procedures are always emerging that help make cardiovascular operations less invasive and more successful. Although it may be stressful to work with new technology or procedures for the first few times, many nurses inherently enjoy learning new skills. Being in a field that allows you to stay on the cutting edge, with the latest, most advanced tools and techniques at your disposal, may be a benefit that spurs you to check out the CVOR.

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Drawbacks of CVOR Nursing



All nursing roles come with a high degree of pressure caused by little downtime, maintaining your composure when working with difficult patients or family members and the need to think critically in life-or-death situations. CVOR nursing comes with these and other similar drawbacks inherent to a nursing career. Three primary disadvantages of becoming a CVOR nurse include the following.

High-Stress Environment

Like other nursing specialties in which you care for critically ill patients whose conditions could change at any moment, the CVOR is a high-stress environment. Assisting surgeons with complex procedures potentially resulting in negative outcomes is a significant driver of stress in the CVOR. Sometimes RNs also must cope with ultra-demanding surgeons who like things done a certain way and may yell or become disrespectful if they feel someone isn't doing things the way they want them done. Dealing with a **toxic teammate** may make an already high-stress environment intolerable.

Emotional Toll of Losing Patients

CVOR nurses work in a field where there's an increased chance of losing a patient. Surgery on any major organ comes with risks. While some heart surgeries may be less risky than others, many CVOR patients may already be critically ill and surgery may not be enough to save their life. While sharing in the victories makes the job well worth it, the emotional toll of losing patients can weigh heavily on a CVOR nurse's heart. Working through the death of a patient requires dealing with strong emotions, potentially including a sense of helplessness, anger, sorrow and/or guilt. It can be difficult not to let these emotions spill into your personal life.

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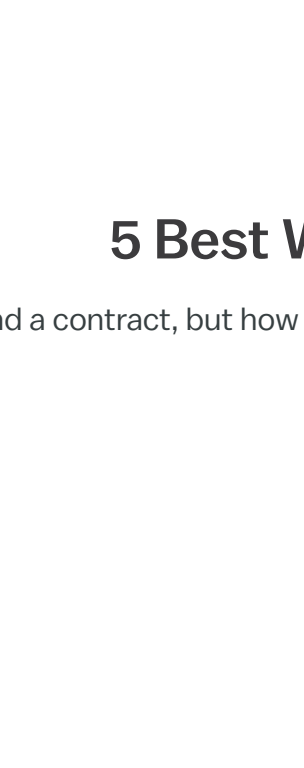
Long Work Hours

CVOR nurses generally work in a hospital setting, so their hours vary depending on the hospital's needs. They may work 8-hour or 12-hour shifts, but complex surgeries don't always conform to a set schedule. Complications can make surgeries run long, and CVOR nursing isn't a job where you can just clock out when your shift is over if you're still in surgery.

CVOR nurses may also work on-call, meaning they must report to work whenever they're called in. You may get called in on weekends or holidays when you have plans to be with family or friends or in the middle of the night. If you're a single parent or called in while your spouse is at work, it may be difficult to find childcare on short notice, and it may come at a premium when you do. No matter your nursing role, being on call can be physically, mentally and emotionally exhausting.

Despite the drawbacks, becoming a CVOR nurse may be a calling you can't ignore. While stressful, CVOR nursing positions offer a competitive salary and job security. You also have ample opportunities to positively impact your patients' lives, and sometimes that makes all the negative aspects just fade away.

Explore where your cardiovascular OR nursing career can take you by searching the staff or **travel CVOR nurse jobs** available nationwide on Vivian today.



Moira K. McGhee

Moira K. McGhee is Vivian's Content Writer & Editor. As part of the Vivian Health team, she strives to help support the empowerment of nurses and other medical professionals in their pursuits to find top-notch travel, staff, per diem and local contract positions.

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