



Solving Legal and Business Problems of Health Care Providers for Over 30 Years

140 West Germantown Pike, Suite 200
Plymouth Meeting, PA 19462-1421

www.healthcaregroup.com

1.800.473.0032

Interviewing – The Process

FINDING A PRACTICE

There are three types of practices that you will join: (1) academic; (2) clinic-based; and (3) private (physician owned) practice. Most new physicians join established practices. A smaller percentage of physicians are recruited to an area by a hospital offering a short-term financial guarantee. Others join a multi-specialty clinic that is associated with a hospital or insurance company. Still others, who enjoy research and teaching, remain in an academic environment. Making the best possible "deal" for yourself depends first on you recognizing the right practice environment for you when you see it, and second on your success in promoting yourself to that practice, which many people find difficult to do.

If you are going to an academic position, you may have the responsibility of marketing your department, if the hospital has a new heart program. The pressures for marketing are not so dominant in a clinic environment, but oftentimes, those responsibilities are stated in the contract. However, if you are going into private practice and will have responsibility for development, you will need to sell (market) yourself (and your practice) for the rest of your professional life.

While many physicians count on prospective employers to find them, this is not the way to perform a search that is tailored to what you want. **You, must be actively engaged in the process.** If you are engaged in the process and determine your own search criteria, you eliminate wasted time considering practices which may be initially attractive, but do not meet your search criteria.

First, do you have any geographic preferences? If so, concentrate your search in those locations by contacting local hospitals and groups in the area to tell them about yourself. Additionally, discuss your geographic preferences with any people who will be influenced by your decision (i.e. spouses, families, friends, etc.). An unhappy family can make for an unhappy physician, even in an otherwise perfect practice situation.

Second, consider talking to recruiters. Recruiters are typically paid by groups and practices that are searching for associates. Using a recruiter saves the employer time and energy. Furthermore, because the recruiter is often only paid by the employer once an associate is signed, the recruiters are often both highly motivated to find associates and a good barometer of who is looking and what the "packages" look like.

Third, return to anyone you trained with or who was ahead of you in a program to see if they know of anyone. Even if they do not know of anyone, they may be able to give you an opinion regarding programs and practices you are considering.

Fourth, talk to product/device and pharmaceutical representatives. They are often very keyed in on who is looking for an associate (or is busy) and where. The representatives are also usually part of a larger network.

Once you have located these practices, implement a system for promoting yourself to your potential employers after you have made the initial contact with some prospective job opportunities.

MAKING CONTACT WITH A PROSPECTIVE PRACTICE

Cover Letter

If you plan to join an existing practice, start by sending the practice a cover letter and a copy of your curriculum vitae (CV), either as your initial contact with the practice or to follow up after you have met

a member of the practice. Send your cover letter and CV to the practice administrator or the managing physician responsible for the search. In the case of joining an academic position, either send it to the Department Chair or the Program Director.

Remember, first impressions last. If you have any doubt about the person's correct name, how to spell it, the person's title, the person's position in the practice, or the like, call the practice.

Your cover letter should contain at least the following information:

- Your full name, address, day and evening phone number(s), pager number and e-mail address (which you must check);
- How you learned the practice is looking for an associate/faculty;
- What makes you a good candidate for the position;
- Your medical and cardiology training status and when you will be finished;
- A request for a telephone interview to learn more about the practice and the physicians involved; and
- How, when, and where you can be reached by phone.

Your CV should contain at least the following information:

- Your full name, address, day and evening phone number(s), pager number and e-mail address (which you must check);
- All of your medical training: where you trained, when you trained (and in what areas), with whom you trained;
- All awards and honors that reflect well on your talents, even if they are not medically related;
- Any research or articles that you have published, contributed to or collaborated with, even if the topic is not medically related;
- Any special professional or non professional interests that you wish to pursue; and
- State licenses, Board status or other certifications.

Your CV is a complete recitation of your personal, professional and academic accomplishments. It must answer the questions – who, why, when, where, and how of your past. Your CV is also sales literature on what you have to offer. It must be neat, accurate, and complete. The "timeline" for you should be complete. Absolute honesty and adherence to detail is required.

Your CV should also be addressed to the appropriate audience. As necessary, you may have more than one CV (short or long). Consider the image you are trying to put forward. If you want an academic position, all research, certifications, papers, presentations and so on are required. However, consider the impression you would make if you sent that same CV to a smaller group practice in the suburbs without an academic appointment available. The smaller group may not think you are serious about your inquiry or knowledgeable about their type of practice, casting doubt upon your true interest and compatibility with the practice.

Prepare your CV carefully and check for typographical and grammatical errors. Print your CV on good quality stationery or résumé paper, and be prepared to send it electronically (remembering that Microsoft Word format is the acceptable business standard). Spell check and proofread the final

document (you do not want a "public" interest to become a "pubic" interest), and make sure your full chronology is reflected there. Do not list your license or DEA numbers. Note only that they are available.

SCHEDULING A TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

Suppose, in response to your letter and CV, someone interested in speaking to you has just "beeped" you, or left you a message. Call them back quickly, even if it is just to say that it is inconvenient to speak at that exact moment and you would like to schedule a time to call back. Timeliness is important, as it shows you care.

When possible, schedule the subsequent phone conference as soon as possible and for a time when you have at least one uninterrupted hour to talk. When you communicate with the prospective practice, offer your full attention. Do not try to do other things at the same time. Your distraction will show in your voice, indicating that you are not really interested in the practice.

FOLLOWING UP ON TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Always follow up every telephone interview with a thank you note, even if you are not planning on pursuing an interview. Situations change frequently and medical communities can be very small.

Your goal on talking on the phone is to learn enough about the practice or department to decide if you want to see the practice. If so, ask for that visit! If not, kindly let them know you are not interested and do not mislead them. This is not like applying for college and trying to hold onto a "safety."

Neat, handwritten notes (or e-mail) are better than type-written ones unless your handwriting is hard to read. In the thank you note, remind the person you spoke to about the date and general topic of your conversation, your special talents, and so on. If you are still interested in the practice then (again) request an interview to meet the practice physicians and to see the practice in operation. Remind the person how to reach you (phone number, beeper number, ideal times to go out and so on), and always end with a thank you for the opportunity to speak to that person and an upbeat comment!

THE PRACTICE INTERVIEW IS A TWO-WAY STREET

You have had a successful telephone conference with one of the practice representatives or the department head and you have been invited for an interview. (Usually the practice pays reasonable travel costs.)

Your interview is your most important step in assessing a practice. It is one of the few times that you are face to face with your potential colleagues. Be prepared to ask important questions, observe the practice working, and see the way people interact in the practice.

Your interview is an ideal opportunity for you to display your medical knowledge and skills, your opinions and views of patient care, and most importantly, your personality and your philosophy of medicine. In a good interview, both sides are open, honest, and fair in the way they present themselves to the other party. Ideally, you are a candidate of interest to the practice, and the practice presents an interesting opportunity for you.

The interview process is a two-way street. **Both sides want the interview to be successful.** The recruiting doctors are eager to conclude their search for a new doctor, and you are eager to find a good opportunity to pursue your career. Both sides are hoping to make a commitment so this process is over and each side can quickly return to their own business.

Remember, that while both sides want this to work, that in turn means that both sides are (likely) on their "best" behavior. Your goal remains; however, to see if this is a group of people with whom you **want to** practice professionally.

Remember, this all important caveat: you will most likely be hired without ever seeing your colleagues practice or them seeing you practice. Therefore, much of this hiring decision will be made

based on each other's **perception of their ability to get along** with each other and to fit in, and what people "say" about you, and what you "hear" about the practice physicians. This is where most of the "errors" are made. Be sure you come to the situation prepared so you see what is really going on and you really do leave the interview with the information you need to make a decision.

THE INTERVIEW FORMAT

There are many ways practices may approach the interviewing process, depending upon their style, their particular location, and the number of candidates to be interviewed.

In urban areas, where there is often a greater abundance of candidates, practices may have a series of interviews with each candidate. The process may start with brief meetings and then go into more in-depth meetings during the second (and possibly third) interviews. In more remote areas, practices may go through the entire process with a single candidate in one in-depth meeting. Recognize which type of situation you are facing.

While there are no rules, a good interview will include at least the following steps:

1. Meetings with all the senior and associate physicians in the practice (certainly all of those in your sub-specialty).
2. Meetings with key administrative and support personnel in the practice.
3. Meetings with hospital administration and/or key medical staff, as well as a tour of the hospital facilities. (Be sure to see the labs.)
4. An opportunity to see the physicians interacting with patients, in both the office and the lab(s), if possible.
5. A community tour normally accompanied by a realtor, so you have a chance to see the housing options and to learn about the social climate in the community, the school systems, and other important community features.
6. A social meeting with the physicians, such as a relaxed dinner to give you the chance to talk more candidly to the doctors and their spouses.
7. Your opportunity to discuss yourself.
8. Your opportunity both to learn the general business plan/vision and to see who really runs the practice.

Encourage them to talk about the practice!

To help you in this area, consider the [Checklist For Conducting an Effective Interview](#).

Depending upon the practice's location, your spouse or "significant other" should accompany you on at least one of these visits, since his or her input on where you (both) live is important in making your final practice selection. Know what format your practice visit will follow before you get there so you know what is expected. Always find out in advance, when it's appropriate, whether your spouse or fiancée is invited to attend the interview, and if so, if his or her agenda will be different from yours.

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Interviews can be stressful because you may not have had a lot of practice with this type of interview.

Ask if the practice is going to pick up all (or just some) of your expenses. Eliminate needless expenses, particularly if the practice is paying.

With these details out of the way, you can now focus on the important preparation for the interview - what you are going to say and how you will present your points.

Interviewing for a job is not like chatting with your friends. It is about soliciting and conveying specific aspects of information. Anticipate the questions that the practice interviewers might ask you, and know the information you need to make a decision.

Start with what they are likely to ask you. These questions come in a variety of styles and can be asked either directly or indirectly. Practice your responses, so that under the stress of the interview, you do not fumble for an answer. Beyond the questions discussed in prior chapters, other commonly asked interview questions are:

- Why did you choose your particular subspecialty cardiology?
- What do you like or dislike most about this specialty? Subspecialty?
- What are your long-term practice goals? Personal goals?
- Why do you think you would like to practice in this setting?
- In what areas do you think you can contribute most to our practice (or hospital)?
- Why are you interested in this position?

These questions are all designed to get you to talk about yourself and to reveal "what makes you tick," what expectations you already have about practicing, and, where possible, why you feel that way. One commonly asked question that you should always expect is the "tell me about yourself" question. This question is so broad that it needs to be broken down into two basic components, i.e., professional and personal.

Professionally, this question could be answered rather simply by a statement of why you chose a career in medicine and in cardiology, your basic training interests and your practice goals you have. On the personal side, however, your answer should include where you grew up, your family background, your outside interests and your hobbies.

As you prepare for your interview, *compose a list of questions you would like to have answered.*

- Why are you looking for an associate/faculty?
- How do you intend to help your new associate to become busy seeing patients?
- Of the previous associates who were successful in the practice, what characteristics and skills did they have that contributed to their success?
- What are the long-term plans for the practice?
- How has the practice started to move towards these goals?
- Describe a typical day/week in the practice for a new associate/faculty.
- From what referral sources does the practice receive its patients?
- How many competitors does the practice have?
- How is this practice similar to or different from its competitors?

There are a variety of other questions that you might ask, depending on the responses to these broader questions. The purpose is to see whether the overall opinions and views of the senior doctors are similar to your personal views, and whether there is a basic philosophical agreement (or disagreement) between you and the senior doctors.

After that has been accomplished, the discussion should move on to more specific areas, such as proposed salary, benefits, call schedule and plans for terms of ownership, if any.

FINAL TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING

We have focused on the substance of the interview, but you must remember that the style and tone that is projected by both sides during this stage of the process is equally important. On the one hand, assume that the doctors interviewing could be your potential colleagues. On the other hand, avoid being overly familiar with them. Be polite, friendly, and open in your presentation.

1. Present the image you want to present;
2. Provide feedback about yourself and your aspirations;
3. Promote yourself and your ability to contribute in a meaningful way:
 - Demonstrate that you have the skills, training, and traits they need;
 - Reinforce this position with specific examples;
4. Do not initiate salary or financial discussions until they do;
5. Be yourself, but be yourself on your "best behavior";
6. Watch for verbal and physical clues about the practice;
7. Watch your (subtle) body language.

A version of this article was presented to Guidant Corporation. It was reviewed and updated in 2007. Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting and use of this article provided that such distribution is free, and provided that the source and ownership of this material is acknowledged to be The Health Care Group, Inc.®. This article can be found online at www.healthcaregroup.com.