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Physician's Employment Interview Guide

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Introduction

In my practice, I often find that a common source of professional discontent among physicians is a less than clear understanding or appreciation of the nature of the employment opportunity. By asking the appropriate questions before accepting an offer of employment, a physician can better discern whether an opportunity will be a good fit, and as a result save himself/herself a good deal of frustration. This Guide was created to assist you during the interview process by alerting you to issues you should consider, arming you with questions to ask, and noting questions you should be prepared to answer.

Pre-Interview Considerations

A. Research a potential employer before an interview by visiting the organization's website. A few things you will want to take note of:

1. What type of population or patient mix do they serve? _____

2. How many providers are in the practice or department? _____
3. Are any of the physicians within the practice or department particularly well regarded?

4. How long have the physicians within the practice or department been in practice? _____

5. How long has the practice or department been in existence? _____
6. Have there been any recent practice acquisitions or mergers? _____

7. Are there any expansion efforts underway or planned? _____

8. How does the practice or department as a whole rank against similar organizations? _____

9. What is practice's mission and vision? _____

10. Is the practice in a highly competitive geographic area? _____

B. In addition to visiting the employer's website, you should also search online to see if the organization has been in the news lately, and for what reason. _____

C. Write down interesting key facts that you might want to discuss during the interview.

Interview Mindset

Always keep in mind that you are not the only one being interviewed. In an interview all parties are both interviewer and interviewee. At the end of the day, what matters most is whether the contemplated opportunity comfortably reconciles with your values and preferred lifestyle.

Remember to offer positive feedback. It is best to assume there are other candidates being interviewed for the position you are contemplating. If two equally qualified candidates are being considered, an organization will virtually always make its offer to the one who shows the most interest in the position and who seems most likely to accept it. Make your positive feelings known, particularly those that speak to long term prospects, and be specific with respect to what aspects of the practice you like.

Objective Interview Questions to Ask

As you have likely experienced from residency and/or fellowship interviews, the structure of your interview(s) and, in turn, the opportunity to ask questions can vary considerably. While there are dozens of questions you could ask, you should have a list of your top ten questions so that if you have a limited window to ask questions, you will always remember to pose these most important questions. Below are suggested questions, listed in order of importance:

1. What is the average payment type and ratio? (Medicaid/Medicare versus private insurance plans) _____

2. How does the practice assign patients? _____

3. How many hours per week will I be expected to spend seeing patients in the office and in the hospital? _____
4. How many patients will I be expected to see in the office per day, and per week? _____

5. Describe the type of physician you are searching for? (i.e. the physician whom would be a perfect fit) _____

6. Will I have to go to satellite locations? If yes, how often? _____

7. What is the anticipated call schedule? _____

8. What is the typical age, education, and socio-economic level of the patients I will see? _____

9. What percentage of physicians hired in the last five years are still under your employ? If less than 80%, why do you believe this is the case? _____

10. How long has the position been vacant, and to what do you attribute this period? _____

11. Support services offered by the medical practice? (assigned nurses, medical lab techs, secretary, transcriptions) _____

12. If recruited to fill a perceived need, what is the evidence that the area needs another doctor with my particular talents and skills? _____

13. Average number of new patients seen per year? _____

14. Are doctors here expected to dedicate personal time to practice development? If yes, how frequently? _____

15. What percentage of a physician's time in this practice typically is spent on paperwork versus seeing patients? _____
16. What types of medical procedures are routinely performed? _____

17. What options exist, if any, for becoming a shareholder in the practice? _____

18. What are the conditions precedent to becoming a shareholder? _____

19. Historically, on average, how long does it take to become a shareholder? Who is the most junior shareholder? _____

20. What percentage of practice revenue is dedicated to overhead expenses? _____

21. What is the likelihood the practice will be acquired by a hospital in the foreseeable future? _____

22. Does the employment contract include a non-compete clause? If yes, what are its terms?

23. Any productivity incentives or bonuses included in the physician job contract? If yes, please describe. _____

24. What benefits are offered? (e.g. health insurance, vision, dental insurance, license fees, professional dues) _____

25. Does the employer pay for tail coverage? _____

26. How much dedicated continuing medical education (CME) time and expense reimbursement does the employer provide? _____

27. Exclusive of CME, how many weeks of paid vacation are offered annually? _____

28. Is relocation expense reimbursement offered? _____

Subjective Interview Questions to Ask

1. What do you like best about working here? _____

2. What bothers you most about working here? _____

3. Are your aforementioned views shared by your colleagues? If yes, please elaborate?

4. If you were the sole decision maker in the practice, what would be different, and why?

Appearance Matters

Dress for success. The physicians, and particularly the administrators interviewing you, will draw conclusions about your clinical competence and ability to fit into the organization based upon your appearance.

Men should wear a dark gray or blue suit, or navy blazers and gray slacks. Shirts should be white, your tie should be silk and can be colorful with a conservative pattern. Socks should be dark, and long enough to cover your calf when you cross your legs. Shoes should be black (and polished).

Women should wear conservative business attire that fits well but is not tight enough to border upon inappropriate in light of your silhouette. Makeup should be muted or absent. If your jewelry is particularly impressive (e.g. very large engagement ring), consider wearing only your band so as not to distract the interviewer (or worse frustrate the ability to successfully negotiate for higher compensation based on a perception that you are well off).

Perfume or cologne should be sparingly used, as the scent may agitate the senses of those whom you come in contact with during the interview process (i.e. allergies).

Bring your spouse. A major reason newly hired physicians ultimately leave is spousal dissatisfaction with the location of the spouse's practice. Bringing your spouse shows the prospective employer that you are thoughtfully considering the opportunity, and are wise enough to know that more goes into the decision of where you will practice than your own comfort. In fact, employers recognize that relocating to another part of the country is a family decision, and may request that your spouse accompany you to dine with decision makers so everyone can collectively assess whether it would be a good fit. Your spouse however should avoid taking charge of the interview or becoming an overly aggressive advocate.

Questions You Should Be Prepared to Answer

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why did you choose to go into medicine?
3. What are you looking for in your next employment?
4. Why are you changing jobs?
5. Why did you choose our practice location?
6. What level of compensation do you require?
7. What are your long-term professional goals?

8. Why do you want to work with us?
9. What do you feel you can bring to the group?
10. Describe your approach to medicine/practice philosophy?
11. Ideally, how many patients would you see in the office daily?
12. On average, how long do you spend with each patient in the office?
13. What are your strongest clinical areas? Why are you of that opinion?
14. What do your patients like most and least about you?
15. What do you feel are the most important contributions you have made to your former/current practice or hospital?
16. Have you ever come before any committee of a hospital or peer review group for review or had privileges revoked or suspended?
17. Have you ever had any disciplinary actions or problems of professional competence?
18. Are you aware of any claims or investigations against you (past or present)?
19. Have you had any malpractice suits?

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, your journey to this point in your career has not been short or easy, and you owe it to yourself to ensure that your next employment situation is one that suits you well, rewards your efforts, affords professional growth and development, and allows you to spend time quality time with the people whom mean the most to you. I sincerely hope that you find this Guide to be a useful tool as you interview prospective employers and wish you continued success in your career.

If you have any suggestions on how to improve this Guide, or would like to know how we can be of assistance as you consider employment opportunities please feel free to contact me. I can be reached via email at rjholloman@hollomanlawgroup.com or phone at 202.572.1004.

Sincerely,
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